



010 by lonewolf5232

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Characters: Dustin H., Eleven/Jane H., OC

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-01-01 22:05:10

Updated: 2019-02-13 00:01:28

Packaged: 2019-12-12 20:14:57

Rating: T

Chapters: 9

Words: 27,614

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: This story takes place right after Eleven closes the gate. With Hawkins Lab abandoned, a secret resident finds their way out. While walking home Lucas, Dustin, and Max come across a strange girl alone and barefoot in the woods. They notice the all too familiar tattoo on her wrist and Dustin takes her under his wing and works to make her part of the party.

1. Chapter 1

I haven't published any Stranger Things content and haven't posted anything on here in quite awhile. I hope you enjoy. I don't own anything mentioned.

She was scared and cold. She followed the sound coming from the start of the woods. Part of her feared that it could be the men who she had just escaped from.

They were too far for her to reach with her powers. It could be the monsters that took over the lab, death was better than going back there.

She moved closer and could finally hear inside. She flipped through their minds like filing cabinets and knew they were good.

There were three, young like her. Two boys and a girl, she had never seen someone her age besides her brother but that was long ago. She moved fast so she could get closer. She needed their help, she couldn't stay out here anymore.

She stepped onto the path behind them and cleared her throat. They turned around and flinched when they saw her.

They looked her up and down, this made her scared. She looked down at her bare feet, dirty and red from the cold.

"Are you alright?" The one on the end asked. He had lots of curly hair sticking out from underneath a hat. She went through his thoughts, he was good. He worried about her, she reminded him of someone named El. She went through the other two's thoughts and found his name was Dustin.

"Here take this," Dustin stepped forward and unzipped his coat. When he got close she flinched, she didn't mean to but couldn't help it.

"Its alright, I won't hurt you. But you'll freeze out here." He spoke slowly and moved slower. He placed the coat over her shoulders. She put her hand to his cheek and dived further into his mind. She

watched moments of his life through his eyes and it made her smile.

"Dustin, thank you." She said softly. He was about to ask how she knew his name when he looked at the inside of her left wrist. He saw the number *010* tattooed, he thought of El again.

"Is your name ten?" He asked quietly. She shrugged her shoulders in response and lowered her hand from his face. She tucked it inside the jacket and smiled at the warmth. He smiled back, she liked his dimples.

"Dustin, everything ok?" The boy with darker skin asked, fear in his voice. She could hear what he was thinking, and it made her feel bad. She was scaring him and the girl too.

"That's Lucas and Max, they're my friends. They won't hurt you either." He pointed them out and looked at her with a cautious smile.

"Were you at the lab?" Lucas asked. She nodded.

"Did you know El, Eleven?" He asked again. She shook her head. She put her hand to Dustin's cheek again trying to find this El they kept thinking of. She could feel his shoulder's tense when she touched him.

What is she doing? He thought. She ignored that and kept searching, she finally found the moment. A small girl with a shaved head in a yellow shirt too big on her. She had the number on her arm, *011*. El was from the same place as her and her brother.

"Not ten, just my number. I don't know El, but she lived where I did, the bad place." She spoke to them, trying to speak loud enough so they can hear.

Papa's voice was echoing through her head, *speak up, Papa can't hear you when you mumble*. She shook at the thought of him and tried to push it away, she brought the tattered sleeve to her nose and wiped the blood.

"What are we going to do with her?" Max asked Lucas and Dustin.

"I'll take her home with me; my mom is probably asleep now." Dustin

said, he looked at her as he spoke.

"Are you sure? She could be dangerous." Lucas said in a hushed tone. This hurt her, she wasn't bad.

"Not dangerous, I'm good." She said to Dustin.

"I know, forget them. Lucas is jealous that you touched my face." He laughed, his laugh was infectious and made her smile.

Dustin put his hand on the middle of her back, she couldn't help but flinch at his touch. She exhaled and looked at him apologetically.

She started walking with them, they were quiet. Well quiet in the sense they didn't speak but their thoughts were loud.

They didn't just think about her, they wondered what powers she had, what she was doing to Dustin. They also thought about Will and Mike and the Mindflayer. They thought about how El closed the gate.

Their thoughts were so interesting, she wondered who these people are most of all she wondered about El. Could El be her sister, maybe she knew where her brother went or what happened to Papa.

They walked for a little, she wasn't as cold anymore. Her legs and feet still felt frozen, but Dustin's coat was big on her and so warm.

They walked out of the woods and she felt a bit scared. It seemed like the monsters killed all the bad men, but more might still come for her. If El was from the bad place too and she was still safe maybe that meant the bad men won't look. This thought made her feel less afraid.

Max and Lucas walked in a different than they did. She liked walking with just Dustin, it wasn't as loud as when there were three minds.

Max and Lucas weren't as afraid as they were when they first saw her. She knew why they were scared, she was a stranger and she looked kind of scary. She wore a hospital gown and a bloody lab coat she took from one of the bodies she passed on her way out of the lab. Her hair had leaves stuck in it from sleeping on the ground.

"Did El stop the monsters?" She asked quietly. She remembered hearing all the screaming in the halls and could only get inside people's heads a few times. The cement walls were hard to get through and the people ran by fast, but she saw the monsters through their eyes.

"Yeah, they're gone now. They can't come back-"Dustin looked at her "-and the bad men won't come back either." He continued. This made her feel safe. She didn't have to be afraid of the bad men.

"Sorry about Dart. You cared." She said softly. Her heart ached watching that moment, she could feel Dustin's sadness.

"How do you know about that?" He asked.

"I can see inside, I can watch your memories and feel your feelings." She replied.

"Is that why you touched my cheek?" He asked with wonder.

"Best way to see, without touching I can only hear the thoughts." She answered and continued walking, the road was cold to her feet.

"So, you can read minds? Like Professor X? You have to meet El." He stopped and spoke fast. He thought is was cool, he called her a superhero. She didn't know who Professor X was or what a superhero was.

The didn't walk for very long before they reached Dustin's house. His driveway was steep, but the porch light comforted her. She had been in the dark woods for almost two days, it was nice to see light after so long in the dark. Dustin guided her to the back of the house.

"Wait here, I'll let you in through the window. Ok?" He whispered. She nodded in response. He walked back to the front and she waited nervously.

Finally, the window in front of her opened. And Dustin smiled at her and put his arm out to help her through. She took it and let out a sigh of relief when she was greeted by the warmth. His house was dark but so warm, warmer than the bad place.

She sat on the chair by the window, the room was poorly lit by small paper lanterns strung to the wall. There was also a red light over Yrtle's terrarium, that memory made her giggle.

She had never seen a creature like that, but the way Dustin felt when he got him was unlike anything she had felt. When she went through the bad men's minds there was always hate and anger and regret. She felt bad being there, having to go through bad men's heads made her bad sometimes.

"You can put these on, I'll wait out there." He sat some pajamas down on the bed and smiled. She liked his dimples and how bright his teeth were. He walked out and quietly shut the door.

She took off the lab coat and glared at it as it hit the floor. She pulled the hospital gown off and put it on the floor, she exhaled and put on the long sleeve shirt that was too big for her and she put on the fleece pajama pants that kept falling off her slender frame. She decided to just hold them onto her waist.

"Dressed now." She whispered to the door and Dustin walked through it. He smiled and chuckled at her.

"Sorry they're big. Its all I have." He whispered. She put her hand on his wrist and could feel her cheeks redden. He was happy but embarrassed and he thought she looked even smaller wearing the oversized pj's. She tried to contain her giggling.

"Do you see something when you touch me?" He asked softly.

"Sometimes, that time I felt the same as you. Happy and red." She whispered back.

"Red?" He asked.

"Red like your face, you felt all red and thought it was funny." She replied. He chuckled again.

"I like your laugh, makes things better. Feel better, not afraid." She told him, he smiled a different type of smile. This one was not like the red one, but it was a warmer smile. He thought good thoughts about her, they made her happy.

"We should sleep, my mom will come in to check on me and I've gotta wake up before her." He spoke fast and looked down at the ground.

"You sleep in my bed and I'll sleep on the floor. Oh, shit lemme hide these." He picked up the lab coat and the hospital gown and rolled them up in a ball and threw them into his closet.

He took one of the pillows off his bed and the small blanket off the foot of his bed and got down on the floor. She got on the bed and pulled the Star Wars blanket over her. His flannel sheets were soft and warm, his bed was nicer than the one in the bad place, not as hard. She put her head on the pillow and looked over at him, he closed his eyes but she could tell he wasn't sleeping.

A girl in your bed, a fucking girl in your bed! Shit. Dustin thought to himself. His cheeks reddened, and he opened his eyes and looked at her.

Can you hear me? He thought again.

"Yes." She replied.

"Thank you." She whispered to him.

"You don't have to thank me. I'm sorry you were in those woods, had to be scary." He spoke softly.

"Not as scary as the bad men, or the monsters." She replied.

"Well, the monsters are gone. My friend El killed them all, she's a badass and she closed the gate."

"Can I see more of her?" She asked him. He nodded and put his arm up to her. She grabbed his wrist with both hands and searched.

She watched the memories of El, when he found her he was scared. But when she showed her powers he thought she was cool, he laughed. El was strong but had different powers. She also saw El with longer hair, she looked scary. El's nose bleeds too after using her powers.

"El is strong." She whispered and let go of his hand. She put her sleeve to her nose.

"Are you strong like her?" He asked.

"Different kind of strong, I can't move things. I see and feel. I can see moments through your eyes and feel and see everything you did. I can hear what you think, and I can do a bad thing." She started to sniffle.

"I don't like that though, it hurts too much." She whispered. He nodded and didn't know what to say. He wondered what the bad thing was but then caught himself and knew she could hear.

He tried to get himself to sleep but he just kept thinking. She tried to block out his thoughts, but it was hard, they were loud, and he was so close to her.

She finally found herself starting to fall asleep, she gave into the sleepiness. She started falling into the darkness of sleep when something caught her. His thoughts were of her, he was picturing her. Her blue eyes and her dark hair that touched her shoulders.

To him her eyes were big and round and scared like a deer's. In his eyes, she was good, she was a person not a thing.

She smiled at his view of her. She was much better in his eyes. She put her hands over her heart like she did every night and tried to go back. Go back through her mind to the earliest moment. She passed through memories of Papa and her brother and the tests.

She finally found it, her Mama, she saw it for a moment. The room yellow and warm flooded by the afternoon sun. She was so cold, she was so tired, she was hurting so much. She cried out for her babies. But her cries were ignored.

Papa told her those moments weren't real. They were fragments from other people's memories that she had pieced together.

That wasn't true, it was her Mama. Her Mama had blue eyes like hers and brown hair like her brothers and she looked tired and felt sad.

She wiped the blood from her lip and let herself fall asleep. She drifted to sleep thinking of Mama and Papa and her brother, she hoped they were all alive. Finally, she thought of Dustin; her new friend that gave her his coat and his warm bed and safety.

AN: I hope you liked this. With the release date put out it really got me in the spirit and this idea has been eating at me for awhile. Thanks for reading!

2. Chapter 2

Second chapter, happy reading!

I don't own anything.

She heard muted voices, her eyes fluttered open. For a moment she had forgotten the night before. She sat up quickly and looked around with fear before the memories came rushing back.

She remembered finding Dustin and Max and Lucas. She remembered his warm coat and his warm room and his big pajamas she was still wearing.

She could hear Dustin's voice, it was muffled but she could make out his laugh. There was another voice, a woman's, she sounded happy.

She got out of the bed and tiptoed across the striped carpet. She stopped and looked around. Last night she couldn't see his room very well in the dark and she just saw it as background in some of his memories. The pants kept falling down so she just stepped out of them and left them on the floor next to a pile of dirty laundry.

She looked at the posters on the wall, Star Wars and The Ghostbusters. He had toys and clothes littering the floor. Her eyes found Yrtle's terrarium, he was basking in the red heat lamp.

She tiptoed forward, she pulled the screen lid off and picked him up by the sides of his shell. That's how Dustin did it in the memory. His shell felt like stone and he legs were rough, unlike anything she'd felt before.

"Sorry." She whispered to him. She could feel his fear and anxiety, she was a new person and he didn't feel safe in her hands. She put him on the carpet and sat cross-legged in front of him.

She watched him slowly move across the carpet like his feet were stuck to the floor. She giggled as she pet the top of his head with the back of her index finger.

Dustin had walked into the room after his mother left for work. She

hadn't noticed him open the door, she was mesmerized by Yrtle's slow movements. She giggled at him, the sound of Dustin's thoughts caused her to turn. She looked at Dustin with blushing cheeks. He smiled back at her.

"What's *adorable*?" She asked him. His cheeks immediately reddened.

"Uhg, it's like cute." He rubbed the back of his neck and looked at the ground.

"Like pretty?" She questioned further.

"Kind of, like a funny pretty." He laughed the words. She shrugged her shoulders and looked back at the tortoise making a break for the closet. She gently gripped his shell and moved him back in front of her.

"So, you need a name. I have to call you something." Dustin said smiling. She gave him her attention.

"Do you wanna go by ten?" He asked. She thought for a moment and looked down at her wrist, she moved the pajama sleeve up and looked at the numbers. She remembered the bad place and Papa and felt sick. She shook her head in response.

"No, ok. Well what about Madison, like in *Splash*? Not that I saw it, it's a girl movie." His cheeks blushed. And they both started giggling.

He dropped into the chair by the foot of his bed and started thinking, she looked at the floor and saw a smooth shape that reflected the sunlight. She moved it around in her fingers. It was white with black numbers on each side counting to ten.

"That's a decahedron, it's one of the dice we use in d&d." He spoke plainly then sat up.

"That's it, that could be your name." He smiled then frowned.

"If you like it." He said with a forced shrug.

"Decahedron?" She wasn't sure about it. She looked at the die in her hand.

"Maybe not, what about Deca?" He suggested.

"Deca. Deca." She repeated. It felt nice in her mouth and maybe it suited her.

"A decahedron has ten sides and its small, like you, but strong, like you can't break it. And we use it for percentile rolls, you definitely break the odds." He smiled then his cheeks blushed again.

"I like it. I'm Deca." Deca said. She still wasn't sure about the name, but she liked that it came from Dustin.

"Hi Deca, I'm Dustin." He put his hand out to hers. She took it and immediately felt as he did. He was happy that she had a name and happy that he met her.

"I'm happy I met you too. Can I meet El and Mike and Will too? And Steve? And Max and Lucas again?" She asked, eyes wide with hope.

"How do you know about everyone?" He asked.

"Moments, the special ones." She replied.

"What *can* you do?" He spoke with caution, he wasn't sure if it was ok to ask that.

"I can hear thoughts, see memories, feel feelings." She spoke softly, trying not to scare him.

"That's badass." He smiled at her.

"Papa made me do bad things too, but I didn't want to. I'm not bad." She spoke seriously. This tone scared Dustin a bit.

"What bad things?" He asked in a low voice, almost a whisper.

"Pain." She said. He knew not to ask anymore. That small word made her voice shake and her eyes water. She tried to block the memory, but it struck her like lightening.

She kept seeing him, he was handcuffed and had a black eye. His thoughts were fast and loud and scared. They asked him questions

and she told them his answers and when he stopped thinking the answers she did what they told her.

She made him feel all his pain, she brought every ounce of pain he's ever felt back into his body all at once. He screamed and cried, and she felt it all too. That broke him, but it also broke her.

"Shit, are you ok?" Dustin asked kneeling onto the floor in front of her. She wiped the tear off her cheek.

"Bad memory." She shrugged her shoulders and exhaled.

"I'm sorry, are you hungry?" He asked trying to lighten the mood. She nodded eagerly, she had eaten in a few days. They both got up and she followed him to the kitchen. She liked looking at the pictures of him when he was little, with his friends, always smiling big. In most the pictures he didn't have teeth, he looked funny.

"Cute." She smiled at the framed picture of him holding a much smaller Yurtle.

"Do you like cereal?" He asked. Deca nodded, she didn't know if she liked it or not. In the mornings, she sometimes didn't eat but if she did she would have oatmeal. She didn't like oatmeal.

"Is Cap'n Crunch ok?" He asked holding the colorful box, she nodded, and the little yellow squares poured into a blue glass bowl. He poured milk over it, threw in a spoon and put it on the kitchen counter for her. She looked at it carefully then picked up the spoon and took a bite.

"Mmm," Deca shoveled more cereal into her mouth. It was sweet and crunchy and made her smile. She ate fast, she hadn't realized how hungry she really was until that moment. She put the spoon in the bowl and looked over at Dustin whose mouth hung open.

"Hungry?" He asked. She nodded and chewed the cereal which crunched loudly in her mouth. He laughed, and she almost spit out the mouthful of Cap'n Crunch she struggled to chew. She tried to focus on the sound of her chewing, she tried to stay out of his head but it was difficult.

She noticed how he kept looking down at her legs. He kept telling himself to stop, to stare at something else. She tried not to listen.

"Is it rude?" Deca asked after finally swallowing.

"What?" He asked.

"Listening to your thoughts." She spoke softly, almost shamed.

"Uhh, no. I don't think so." He shrugged his shoulders. She sighed in relief.

Can you hear me now? Dustin thought. She nodded her head. He laughed.

"Holy shit, that's cool." His smile was big. She finished her cereal as he got dressed.

"Do you want to shower?" He shouted from the bedroom. The idea made her uneasy. She didn't like decontamination; the hose was painful and cold. Dustin came out of the bedroom and his smile faded when he saw her.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"Do I have to?" She whispered.

"I mean no, but you were in the woods for a couple days." He looked down at her feet which still had dirt on them, there was dirt under her nails and she had blood stains on her wrist and leg. She saw his point, she needed to be clean.

"Do we do it outside?" She asked, preparing herself mentally.

"No, in the bathroom." He chuckled then straightened his face. She followed him to the bathroom, he put a towel on the bathroom counter.

"I guess you can use my mom's shampoo. Is that ok?" He asked, his face red.

"Shampoo?" She repeated the word she didn't know.

"Like soap for your hair. Here I'll start the water for you." He bent down and moved the knobs as water poured from the faucet. She sighed with relief when she realized what a shower was. She took off the pajama shirt and dropped it to the ground.

"Shit!" Dustin gasped as he turned to see her. He faced the opposite direction. His thoughts were fast, and he was embarrassed.

"Well, I'll leave you to it." He spoke fast and got out of the bathroom. She didn't know why he got embarrassed. Deca shrugged and stepped into the bath.

The warm water hit her, and she sighed in relief. It felt nice. She put her face in the water and rubbed her hair until it was wet. She looked down at her wrist and rubbed the dried blood off. She started to cry.

Deca tried to stop but the tears came out of her like she was the faucet. She didn't understand how any of this happened. She always wanted to escape the bad men, but she thought she would have her brother by her side.

She thought of his face, he was probably different now. She remembered the times he would comfort her, hold her to his chest and think good thoughts for her to listen to.

She put the shampoo in her hair and scrubbed her feet and legs with the bar of soap. She liked showering, it felt good to rub her scalp with her fingers and rinse the soap out of her shoulder length hair.

She had gotten the dirt out from her fingernails and she looked so clean now. She turned the knob on the wall and the water got ice cold. She yelled at the surprise and then turned the other one until the water stopped.

She stepped out of the tub and reached for the blue towel. She wrapped it around her and breathed out. She sat down on the edge of the tub and looked down at her clean feet, wrinkly and pale.

She stood back up and looked at the foggy mirror on the wall, she wiped it with her hand, so she could see most of her face. Her dark brown hair was flat to her head and her eyes were red from the

crying.

She opened the bathroom door and looked for Dustin. He was sitting on the sofa watching the TV. He looked up at her and immediately flushed. *Don't be weird. Don't be we-* he thought to himself then locked eyes with her.

"Did I do something wrong?" She asked wiping water from her brow.

"No, girls just don't get naked in front of boys." He rubbed the back of his neck, his cheeks were burning.

"Why not?" She asked.

Jesus Christ, he thought. "They just don't." He spoke plainly. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Can I meet El today?" She changed the subject, she didn't like embarrassing him.

"I walkied Lucas, the party's coming over." He gave a small smile.

"I need clothes." She spoke softly and looked down at her feet. She started to get cold. He nodded and went to his room. He handed her some clothes.

"I doubt they'll fit." He chuckled. She nodded and set them down on the couch.

"Wait! I gotta go to my room." He spoke fast and marched out of the room. She forgot about the rule.

She picked up the gray long sleeve tshirt and put it on, it stuck to her wet back, but it was soft. She looked down and there were blue and green plaid boxer shorts, she shrugged and put them on. They were falling off her skinny frame, she folded the elastic waist band over and it helped a bit.

She stepped into the blue sweat pants he left. They had a draw string, she pulled it as tight as it would go and tied it just like how she used to do with the white gown she'd wear.

"Dressed!" She called to him in his room. She heard the door open and he walked into the living room. She smiled at him and this made him smile.

He chuckled at how much smaller she looked in his clothes. She reached out and took his hand in hers, his hand was warm. She saw herself through his eyes, she did look tiny.

"What do you see?" He asked softly.

"Me, I look little." She smiled at him. She started going deeper into his mind, she stepped into a dream.

She was in it, it was them walking through the woods. In the dream it was during the day and the sun made her brown hair shine red. In the dream, Deca looked happy and Dustin felt happy too.

He felt something else besides happy, the feeling was warm and fluttery. It made her belly feel strange and her throat dry, she could feel her cheeks go red.

"Woah," Lucas exhaled from the partially opened doorway. He startled her, and she let go of Dustin's hand and looked at the carpet.

"Dude, she can see my memories. Try." Dustin urged to Lucas as he stepped into the living room.

"Since she's from the lab too, is she like El?" Lucas asked, he already knew the answer though. Dustin nodded and sat on the couch. Lucas looked different in the daytime, he had a nice smile.

"Does she move stuff like El?" Lucas asked. Dustin shook his head.

"Deca reads minds, like Professor X. And she can go into your head, she sees memories." Dustin looked at Deca and smiled. *It's ok, he's our friend.* He thought so she could hear.

"Deca?" Lucas asked, his eyebrows raised.

"That's her name. Like Decahedron, like ten." Dustin explained. Lucas nodded in response when there was a knock at the door. Dustin opened it and Max stood there holding a skateboard. He waved her

inside.

"You look better than you did last night." Max looked Deca up and down and smiled.

"I showered, and I scared Dustin." Deca replied nonchalantly.

"How?" Max smiled and looked curious.

"I got undressed, girls aren't allowed to do that around boys." She said plainly. Lucas and Max erupted into laughter.

"Fuck you guys." Dustin said under his breath. His cheeks were bright red. Deca felt bad, she didn't want to embarrass Dustin.

"Is El coming?" Deca asked curiously, she hoped the question would stop their laughter.

"Mike's coming first. He wants to protect his *El*." Max put her hand to her forehead and rolled her eyes, Lucas laughed. Deca nodded and looked down at the ground again.

She tried staying out of their heads, she was worried that they were thinking about her. She looked towards the door that was opening and saw a tall boy with curly black hair. He looked up and saw her, he looked mad.

"This is Deca." Dustin said to him.

"I'm Mike." He said with a forced smile. He put his hand out to her, she took it and immediately saw flashes of El.

She had a shaved head like Deca had when Papa was around. When she smiled at him his heart raced and he felt happy. His feelings for her were something Deca had never felt before. Her heart felt full, like it could burst.

It was like she was swimming in it, in that feeling. She was drowning in it, but it felt nice. It surrounded her and smothered her but at the same time it lifted her up to the sky.

That happiness turned to pain, heartbreaking pain that she thought

would kill her. It was like her heart did burst, she endured the pain he felt and she saw images of the blanket fort and the radio. She let the tears fall from her eyes, she felt her knees go weak and she feared she might fall. She let go of his hand and looked at him.

"What happened?" Mike asked, he looked at her with confusion and fear. Deca responded by embracing him, she threw her arms around his neck and squeezed him tight.

"I'm sorry." She whispered into his ear. She felt the blood drip onto her lip, but she didn't care. She had never felt pain like that, she didn't know how he survived it after a year of that pain.

She lived through the moments of him crying in bed when no one could hear and punching the pillows El and him used to lay on. His heart broke when El disappeared, Deca never wanted to feel heartbreak. But that feeling El gives him was something she had always wanted, love.

A/N: Hope you liked this chapter. Leave me suggestions for what you'd like to see in the future. I really like writing this. Thanks for reading.

3. Chapter 3

I don't own anything mentioned.

"Ok so, can we just ask you some questions?" Mike asked her as he pulled away. She nodded and wiped the blood from her nose.

"So, you're from Hawkins Lab?" He asked holding eye contact. She nodded again.

"How old are you?" He sat on the chair across from the couch, Deca sat on the couch next to Dustin.

She shrugged, she didn't celebrate a birthday like everyone else and Papa never said how old she was.

"Do you know Eleven?" He asked, this time he looked very serious.

"Only from Dustin's memories." She spoke softly. Mike looked at Dustin and furrowed his brow.

"What kind of powers do you have?" Mike asked and leaned in. Deca felt uncomfortable, all of them looking at her and thinking about her made her palms sweat.

"I can hear thoughts, see memories, feel things. I could feel your love for El, and your pain." She looked at him and felt like she might cry. Mike looked sad for a moment and then he looked angry.

Can you hear this? Mike thought. Deca nodded. How did you feel it? He asked in his mind.

"Through touch, I can hear thoughts from far away. Well sometimes, its easier if they're close. But I have to touch you to see inside." She said to him, the rest of the group listened with curiosity.

"She's reading your mind?" Max asked Mike, her mouth hung open a little. Mike nodded, Max's eyebrows went up and she looked over at Lucas who returned the look.

"What do you mean by 'see inside', like into my head?" He asked, his

tone was stern.

"Your memories, thoughts, dreams, all of it." She replied looking down at her hands in her lap.

"Dreams?" Dustin asked, his cheeks red. She replied with a nod.

"Hey Dusty, any dreams you want to share?" Lucas teased. Dustin raised his middle finger in response.

"Can I meet El now?" She asked Mike. His attention was taken away from Dustin and his smile faded.

"How do we know you aren't trying to lead the bad men to her?" He frowned. She didn't know what to say so she just stood up and lifted the sweatshirt to show her abdomen. Across her stomach and on her ribcage, there were little round pink scars in sets of two.

"What are those?" Mike asked frowning.

"Scars, when I didn't do what they wanted they hit me with the electricity." She put her shirt back down.

"They tased you?" Dustin's mouth hung open. She nodded and the whole group stayed silent.

"I'm not bad. The bad men are gone, Papa is gone, no one can hurt her or me." Deca sat back down. Mike nodded and looked at her with sympathy.

"I have to ask Hopper and talk to El but I think she'd want to meet you." Mike gave her a small smile.

"You could radio El." Dustin said breaking the silence after Mike spoke.

"I don't know if-" Mike began.

"Can we just go to her and Hopper's place." Dustin suggested, he smiled at Deca. This made her get excited.

"I don't know if the chief would like a surprise like this." Lucas added.

The party started discussing what they should do and finally came to agreement on radioing Hopper to come to Dustin's house ASAP. They would tell him about Deca and then ask him what to do. He was good with this stuff and he would handle, according to Dustin anyway.

"You call him." Dustin handed the walkie to Mike. Mike looked unsure then finally nodded. He turned it on and switched the channel over.

"Come in, Chief, this is Mike. Over." Mike bit his lip. The group stood around for a moment exchanging looks of uncertainty.

"Yeah kid, what is it?" Hopper's voice growled from the radio. Mike's eyes widened, he didn't know what to say.

"Uhh, its an emergency. You should come to Dustin's house. We need to show you something. Over." Mike replied. He exhaled, he was hoping Hopper didn't ask further questions.

"I can be over in fifteen. Over and out." Hopper spoke after a moment of silence. The party exhaled in relief.

"Will El come too?" Deca asked.

"No, you've got to meet Hopper first. He'll know what to do." Mike said, exhaling. Deca could tell she was starting to annoy Mike with all the questions.

The party sat together in Dustin's living room waiting for Hopper to come. Max and Lucas were sitting next to each other, Lucas was sitting cross legged on the carpet and Max was sitting on her skateboard.

They weren't speaking, just exchanging glances. Deca smiled at their thoughts of each other. Lucas thought Max was pretty, he immediately smiled after thinking that.

His smile's pretty cute for a stalker. Max thought to herself, causing her to grin.

"What's a stalker?" Deca asked Max, breaking the silence. Max blushed and rolled her eyes, Lucas smirked.

"You can't just read people's minds without permission." Max frowned, her cheeks were red.

"Dustin said it was badass." Deca replied. She didn't know she was being bad.

"Yeah, because he likes you." Lucas added.

"I do not." Dustin retorted. Deca turned to see his cheeks red.

"But you're my friend." Deca spoke softly.

"Yeah, I am, I just don't like you like that." Dustin explained, his cheeks burning brighter.

"Like what?" Deca asked, she found this confusing.

"I don't like like you. Like a girlfriend." He tried to explain further but Deca wasn't understanding. Max and Lucas were giggling.

"But I'm a girl?" Deca sought clarity.

"You're my friend that's a girl, not my girlfriend. Girlfriends are pretty and you want to kiss them and stuff." His voice raised, and he talked fast.

"In your dream you thought I was pretty. Am I not anymore?" She asked again. She felt her own cheeks burn. Max and Lucas were trying to hold in their laughter.

"No, no. Its not like that. I can't control what I dream." Dustin wanted her to understand so badly.

"Papa said that dreams are made up of behaviors the con-conscious mind repre-represses. Does your conscious mind repress me being pretty?" She remembered Papa telling her about dreams after she started going into the bad men's. Max laughed, Dustin sighed and was about to speak.

"Papa as in Dr. Brenner, right?" Mike asked. Deca nodded.

"Was he at the lab?" Mike was very serious and spoke fast.

"Papa's gone, he's been gone for a long time." Deca answered.

"So, Dr. Owens did the experiments to you after Papa left?" He spoke slower.

"No, after Papa they put me in the room. They said I was a risk, they didn't cut my hair anymore or make me go in people's minds. They left me alone." She said softly. She didn't enjoy the experiments but being in that room all alone was torture.

"Were there other kids there? Like you?" Mike leaned towards her.

"I just knew my brother, they let us be together. We were stronger together. But he got out, he's gone now. There was just me." She replied.

"You had a brother? Did he have a number too? Were his powers like yours?" Mike's eyes got wider and his words sped up.

"Nine, he had nine on his wrist. His power was different." Deca whispered remembering his face and the things Papa made them do.

"How were they different?" Mike asked softly.

"I can go inside people's minds, I can find things. See, feel, hear what they have. He could go in people's minds and change things." She thought of her brother.

"He could take away memories or put new ones in, make them forget things, make them feel things or do things they didn't want to." A tear fell down her cheek.

"Papa made him do bad things, he made him hurt people." Deca hugged her knees to her chest. She hated thinking of what Papa made them do.

"It's ok, it's alright. Shhh." Dustin moved next to her on the floor and hugged her. She let her tears fall. She breathed in deep and just focused on Dustin's thoughts.

It's gonna be alright, you're safe now. You don't have to bad things ever again. He repeated inside his head. He was a good friend, she was

thankful for him. The tears stopped, and she wiped her face on her sleeve.

A knock at the door startled her. Lucas got up and looked out the front window.

"It's the chief." He opened the door and Deca felt afraid of the large man standing in front of it. He stepped inside and looked down at her.

Dustin moved his arms off her and stood up. Hopper was wearing a uniform, he was big, and he looked mean. She started shaking.

"Who's this?" Hopper asked, moving the toothpick around in his mouth. All four kids were trying to find the right words when Deca stood up. She pulled the sleeve up and showed him the number on her wrist. Hopper's head flooded with thoughts.

"We found her in the woods by the lab last night." Dustin told Hopper.

"What in the hell were you doing in the woods by the lab? Ya know what, not the point." Hopper sighed.

"Are you alright? You've been in those woods for what? Three days." He looked down at her. She nodded.

"Can you speak?" He asked, his voice was softer than it was when he first came in the door.

"Yes." She replied. He was lost for words for a moment. *What the fuck am I supposed to do?* Kept repeating in his head.

"I don't know." Deca shrugged her shoulders, her voice shook a little with fear. Hopper was intimidating.

"What?" Hopper asked raising his eyebrows.

"I don't know what the fuck you're supposed to do." She answered plainly. The kids tried to hide their laughs, Hopper was puzzled.

"She reads minds." Dustin chuckled.

"Of course, she does, great." Hopper let out a small chuckle and then sighed.

"All right, let's go." Hopper said, he put his hand down towards her.

"No, I won't go back." Deca leaned away from his hand. She wouldn't let him take her back to the lab.

"No, no, kid. We're going to my house. You can meet Eleven and get some clothes that fit." Hopper knelt down in front of her, he spoke to her at eye level. *You're not goin' back there, kid.* He thought while holding eye contact.

"Ok, I'll go with you. Dustin comes." She stood up and looked at Dustin, who smiled when she said that.

"Alright." Hopper nodded and stood up, exhaling.

"And the party." Deca added. Her tone was serious, demanding. Hopper rolled his eyes and sighed.

"I suppose." Hopper turned towards the door. They smiled at her, even Mike who hadn't really smiled the whole time. She followed Hopper outside, the ground was cold on her bare feet.

She sat in the middle of the front seat, Dustin sat next to her. He kept thinking good thoughts for her to listen to. He was a good friend, he reassured her that everything was going to be fine.

She was excited to meet El, she wondered if El knew about her or her brother or about Papa. Hopper parked his truck at the start of the woods. They all got out and started walking.

"Where are your shoes?" Hopper turned to Deca.

"Don't have any." She replied and kept walking.

"Your feet don't hurt?" He asked.

"A little, not bad. I'm fine." She shrugged her shoulders. She didn't enjoy walking barefoot through the woods, the pine needles poked her feet and she had to be careful where she stepped but it was fine.

Hopper didn't ask any more questions, the walk to the cabin wasn't too long. The small cabin was surrounded by trees, it had boards nailed to every window, so she couldn't see inside.

Hopper walked up the steps and did the special knock on the door. There were sounds of unlocking from the other side of the door and it opened.

The girl standing on the other side was short and thin with a mess of curly brown hair. She smiled, and her eyes widened at the sight of Hopper and her friends. She moved so they could all come in.

"Mike," She sighed as she wrapped her arms around him. He hugged her back, this hug made Hopper roll his eyes.

"Are you doing ok?" Mike asked as he let go of her.

"Still tired." El replied. She looked towards the open doorway at Deca.

"This is Deca, she's-she's from" Mike was looking for the right words. Deca stepped towards El and pulled up her sleeve to show her number. El looked at it and pulled her own sleeve up showing the number 011.

"Sister?" El whispered to Deca. Deca nodded, El put her arms around Deca and brought her into an embrace. Deca squeezed her back. Hugging El felt nice, warm, El's cheek was against Deca's neck.

Through this contact Deca could see into El's mind, she saw memories of Papa and the bad men and the bath and even this dark place. This place scared Deca, it was cold and dark and wet, El was scared there too.

She saw memories of the gate, she felt El's strength and her anger and her fear. Closing the gate took a toll on El but it made her stronger too. El was so strong and she was good too.

El let go of Deca and saw that her nose was bleeding. Deca went to wipe it with her sleeve but El handed a tissue to her from the pocket of her overalls. Deca took it and wiped her nose. She looked around the room and saw everyone staring at them, silent.

"Sister." Deca whispered back to El.

4. Chapter 4

"Sister." Deca whispered back to El.

"Do you two want to sit down? We can talk about some things." Hopper broke the silence that clung to the room. Deca was in awe of El, she couldn't believe that there was someone in the world beside her brother that could understand what she'd been through.

Both girls sat on the couch across from Hopper. The party found places to sit in the kitchen or on the floor. El was happy, her thoughts were good and they made Deca smile.

Hopper's thoughts were fast, he wasn't sure how this would work, he felt a bit scared.

Hiding El was one thing but another one of their goddamned experiments was another. He thought, forgetting she could listen.

He remembered the conversation he had with Owens, he was gonna help El. Maybe things wouldn't be so bad. He tried reasoning with himself but the paranoid part of him was stronger.

"We've gotta figure out where you're gonna stay." Hopper exhaled the words.

"She stays here." El demanded.

"We don't have the room." Hopper replied. This made Deca feel scared.

"My sister stays here. She is family." El's eyebrows lowered.

"I can stay with Dustin." Deca said softly.

"Yeah? Is he gonna keep you in a shoe box? Or under his bed?" Hopper rolled his eyes.

"I can stay with-" Deca began.

"You can live here, with me." El told her, her warm brown eyes

smiled at Deca. Hopper growled.

"If you don't want me here I will leave, but please, please don't send me back." Deca pleaded with Hopper, a tear fell down her cheek. He sighed.

"We have rules, and you will follow them and you will have lessons and you-" Hopper conceded. He was interrupted by the girls' celebrations.

"Thank you." Deca jumped up and hugged Hopper. He chuckled a bit and patted her back. She let go of him and hugged El.

"Ya did good, chief." Dustin patted Hopper's arm and smiled.

"Don't touch me." Hopper gave Dustin a warning look. Dustin put his hands in the air and backed away grinning.

Deca couldn't help but stare at the people around her. All of them were exceptional, unlike anyone she had ever met. They were kind and accepting and they all held so much love in their hearts.

She felt safe with them, especially with Hopper. He looked mean and angry but inside he was good. Deca sat back down and watched the exchanges between Mike and El.

"You should be laying down, you need rest." Mike told Eleven, he had such care and caution in his voice.

"Not tired." El replied with a smirk, El was speaking truth. Closing the gate was tolling but she had gone 353 days without seeing her friends, without seeing Mike, and seeing them made her never want to sleep again. El looked at Deca and stepped towards her.

"Ten?" El asked glancing down at her wrist.

"Deca." She corrected. El nodded, she understood wanting to separate from what Papa called them.

"Jane." El gave a small smile. Jane was the name from her mama, Deca didn't know if her mama had given her or her brother names. She hoped that she did.

"You are strong." Deca told her.

"Are you strong? Do you have a gift?" El asked. Deca nodded.

"Not like yours." Deca replied.

"Can I see?" El asked.

"Not something you can see. I can look inside people's heads." Deca explained.

"What's in Mike's head?" El smiled and pointed at Mike whose cheeks were starting to redden.

"He is worried about you, thinks you should sleep. And he doesn't want me to listen." Deca answered. She liked when people had thoughts directed to her, it was nice to be able to listen to just one of their voices.

"What about him?" El nodded to Hopper. Deca listened in.

"He is stressed. His thoughts are fast. Who is Joyce?" Deca asked, Hopper's thoughts started to wander to a woman. He worried about Joyce, how she was doing and when he would see her.

"Joyce is Will's mom. She's good." El spoke softly, she grinned. She knew why Hopper was thinking about Joyce, it was because he thought she was pretty.

"Does she think he's pretty too?" Deca asked El. El thought for a moment.

"Maybe." El said with uncertainty. Hopper could hear their conversation, and this annoyed him.

"He's a good man, he cares for you." Deca told El, she smiled at this. El knew Hopper cared about her, he was like her father. Not like Papa though, Hopper was good.

"Papa was bad, he's gone now." Deca whispered. El looked at her and swallowed, after what Kali said she wasn't so sure he was dead.

"Papa isn't dead?" Deca asked. Everyone in the room turned and stared silently.

"I don't know, haven't looked." El said softly.

"Did Kali want you to look?" Deca asked.

"She wanted me to be like her. Be angry." El replied.

"Who's Kali?" Hopper asked.

"Sister." El and Deca responded in unison.

"Another sister?" Mike asked. He hadn't really gotten much of a chance to talk to El since she closed the gate. He had barely any idea of what happened to her during that year besides living with Hopper.

"Kali finds the bad men, she makes them pay for what they did to us." El spoke, she thought of Kali. She felt sad for leaving her, but she had to save her friends.

"That's who you were with? You said you went to see Mama and Aunt Becky." Hopper looked at her, he was a bit angry but mainly concerned.

"Kali is good, her friends were good." El said aloud, inside she didn't know if that was totally true. They killed people but the people they killed were bad. El wasn't sure if they were good or bad.

"Did you see Kali? Were you in the rainbow room?" El turned towards Deca.

"I didn't know her. I don't remember the rainbow room." Deca frowned.

"Did you ever see my brother? Nine, he had blue eyes and he was tall." Deca thought of her brother.

"No, I didn't see him." El frowned.

"You had a brother? Is he still at the lab?" Hopper asked Deca.

"No, he ran away before Papa left, I was too slow, they got me." Deca told him, she tried to block that memory. She didn't want to cry.

"What happened to you after Brenner left?" Hopper asked.

"The new doctor, he said I brought risks, he kept me in the small room." Deca told him. He nodded and looked at her with sympathy. He felt sorry for her, he felt angry with Owens.

Deca didn't talk much after that. She liked observing them, there was so much love in the room. The party all loved each other very much, Hopper loved El, Mike and El both loved each other more than Deca had ever seen. She had never been surrounded by love before.

Mike and El sat close, he smiled and touched her hair. It was curly, he didn't know she had curly hair.

Dustin sat with her on the small sofa and told her about finding El and about the upside down and Will and Steve. Deca had already seen flashes of these things in his head but she liked that he told her about it. She listened to him with a smile and hung on his every word. She liked the way he described things, his voice was unique and always had a trace of laugh lingering in it.

"Is Will safe now?" Deca asked Dustin.

"Yeah, he's ok now. He's really tired after everything the mindflayer did." Dustin replied, Deca nodded. She could feel how scared Mike was when Will was taken over by the shadow monster, he was scared he would lose his best friend.

"Thank you, thank you for everything." Deca smiled at him. Dustin liked her smile, her eyes looked brighter when she smiled. Her lips were dry and cracked but she didn't care about the pain smiling brought to them. Dustin felt lucky that he found her and that she was so cool.

"You're cool too. Cooler than me." Deca told him. He blushed, he still got embarrassed that she could hear his thoughts.

"No way, you're like Jean Grey. You're a superhero, you're a badass." He grinned. Dustin made her smile so much her cheeks hurt. She had

never met anyone like him, all the people she met were bad, she didn't know people like Dustin existed.

"You are kind and funny and you have happy thoughts and good memories and you're pretty." Deca told him. His cheeks burned red and he looked down at the ground. She didn't like embarrassing him but hated that he didn't think he was cool.

"Who is Jean Grey?" She asked him to try to change the subject.

He looked up and grinned and went into a long speech of the telepathic X-men vixen. She enjoyed his voice and his stories.

They sat together for a long time, the party all shared stories that made El laugh and their thoughts were warm and kind. Deca liked being around them, she was so happy she was here. She got sad when the sun started going down, Hopper said that they needed to leave

"I'll drive you home, c'mon." Hopper said while he put on his jacket. Mike hugged El, he didn't want to let go. Deca's attention was pulled away from them by Dustin.

"I can come by after school tomorrow." He smiled. She nodded and smiled back, but the smile quickly faded into a frown. She was afraid of him leaving, she felt safe with him.

"Its alright, you're safe here. Safer than you are at my house." He tried to make her feel ok. She nodded and gave a small smile. She put her arms around him, she squeezed his shoulders.

You'll be ok. You're safe now. Dustin thought to her. She let go and he walked towards the door. He turned and grinned at her. Lucas made kissing noises at him

"Shut up, asshole." Dustin hissed at him as they walked out the door.

"Bye, Deca. Bye, El." Max gave a small smile and wave. El ignored her but Deca smiled and waved back. She sighed and followed Lucas out but Mike lingered in the doorway struggling to part his gaze with El.

"I'll be back soon; El will lock the door behind me." He told Deca, he raised his eyebrows at El and she nodded in agreement. He walked

out of the cabin and El quickly went and turned the locks and set the chain.

"Mike is so different now." El exhaled the words as her back rested against the door.

"He's tall and his hair is curly, and his smile is different." She says with a small smile, Deca liked this look on El's face.

"Do you want to be called Jane or Eleven?" Deca asks her, El looked at her a bit caught off guard. She thought for a moment.

"I thought I was Eleven, but mama named me Jane. I've been Jane my whole life." She said softly.

"Who do you want to be?" Deca asked.

"I'm El to Mike and my friends and Dad." El thought about what to say. Though her vocabulary has improved over the past year she still had trouble trying to put the words together to describe her thoughts.

"You call Hopper Dad?" Deca asked. She knew what Dad meant, people used dad to describe their father in their memories. Sometimes Dads were mean and angry and other times they were good.

El didn't reply. She didn't know what to say but she also didn't really want to say anything. Deca worried that she upset El with that question.

El sat on the sofa and started flipping the dial on the television with her mind. Deca watched her with awe. The things flashing on the television were bright and loud and colorful.

"Do you want to sit?" El asked Deca. Deca nodded and sat next to her. She pulled her knees up to her chest and watched the television.

"Hungry?" El asked again. Deca looked at her and nodded eagerly.

"Have you had eggos?" El asked her with a smile.

"No, what is that?" Deca asked her.

"They are warm and crunchy, and they pop out of the toaster." El's smile was wide and genuine.

"I get them after dinner. You could try one." El told her. They continued watching television, Deca stayed out of El's mind. She focused on the sounds coming from the box in front of them, she would hear glimpses of her thoughts but try her hardest at shutting them out.

"Are you angry with Max because of her laughing with Mike?" Deca asked softly. El looked at the floor.

"Yes." She whispered back.

"I didn't like that feeling. I'm sorry you felt that." Deca tried to offer sympathy.

Neither of them knew what to call that feeling but they both remember the sick feeling it put in their belly and the way it dried out their throats and the way their hands balled into fists because of it.

After a while, there was a knock at the door. It was the special knock. El stared at the door and unlocked it with a small tilt of her head.

Hopper walked in and glanced at El and Deca sitting on the plaid sofa. It looked like they were getting a long, he really hoped they were.

Jim couldn't help but chuckle a little. He was turning into a damn den mother. Not only did he have a teenage daughter, but he just brought in another pre-pubescent stray. His cabin was turning into the house in "The Facts of Life".

"Hungry?" He asked the girls. They both nodded in response, their eyes not leaving the television.

Jim put three tv dinners into the oven and then opened the fridge to get himself a beer. He popped the top and took a big gulp.

He leaned against the counter and could feel Deca's eyes on him. He turned and looked at her, her eyes shot to the floor when he noticed

her stare. He wondered if she was listening to his thoughts. He thought and looked back to her.

I'm living in the twilight zone. I've got two girls in my house that can throw things at me with her mind or read my thoughts. He chuckled at the thought.

Guess you heard that. He thought while smirking at her. Deca had a small smile on her face.

"We've gotta set some ground rules." Jim pulled a chair up so he sat facing them.

"You can't just read our thoughts. Thoughts are private and it's not polite to listen." He told Deca.

"Why?" She asked.

"Because its not. People have private thoughts that they don't want anyone to hear." He replied.

"Dustin said its cool. I'm like Jean Grey." Deca started getting defensive.

"Well you can read Dustin's thoughts. Not mine, not El's, not anyone's." He told her. She sighed and nodded.

"And you have to do lessons. Reading, writing, arithmetic." Jim spoke. El smirked, Deca tried her hardest to block out El and Jim's thoughts.

"Can I go to school with Dustin?" Deca asked. She liked the way school looked through Dustin's eyes. Learning things sounded fun.

"No, its not safe." Jim told her.

"The bad men are dead." Deca replied.

"There could be more, they'd find you at school and they'd take you back to the room." He told her, his voice was low and cautious.

Deca just nodded in agreement. Jim wanted to protect her, just like

El. The timer on the oven dinged and they all sat down at the table and ate their TV dinners. Deca didn't really like meatloaf, it was mushy, as El called it.

After dinner El and Deca got eggos. Deca liked them, they were crunchy and warm. Jim went to his room to get on pajamas and El changed too.

"You good to sleep on the couch?" Jim asked. Deca nodded. He looked different out of uniform, not as scary.

"There's a pillow and a blanket. It shouldn't get too cold tonight; the fire should keep you warm." Jim told her as he set a quilt and pillow on the couch next to her.

"Thank you." She bowed her head to him.

"Story." El said in a sleepy but demanding voice. He nodded and followed her to her room. He left the door open. Deca watched El get herself comfortable in bed and Jim grabbed a book off the nightstand.

He started reading and his voice made Deca feel sleepy and safe. She stood up and took off the sweatpants, so she was just in the thermal and boxer shorts.

She threw the quilt over her body and she put her head against the pillow. She closed her eyes and listened to Jim's voice. She started falling asleep when she got pulled into a memory. It was hers, of the bad place.

The door to her room had opened along with the lights turning back on and when she walked into the hall she saw bodies and blood. So much blood.

She started running, she almost fell when she slid through a puddle of blood. A trail of bloody footprints followed her to the stairwell. She didn't know how to get out, she was scared and sweaty and her heart was thumping in her ears.

She opened the stairwell and started walking down the hall. She stopped in her tracks when she saw the monsters. They were feeding

on a man, he wore green scrubs and he was quickly dying. She could hear his thoughts, he didn't feel the pain of them ripping apart his entrails.

He felt love and he was content. There was a warmth inside him. Deca felt the tears fall down her cheeks. She could feel his consciousness slipping away.

His thoughts started fading and she felt them go out like a dying flame. There was deafening silence. He was gone. She felt him leave.

Deca sat up breathless, the tears burning her eyes blurred her vision. She couldn't breathe, she was stuck in that feeling, in that silence.

She tried to inhale but her throat was closed up. She kept feeling it. The fading. Death. It scratched at her throat and squeezed her heart. She was petrified by the fading that haunted her.

Her breath came back into her lungs when she felt Jim's strong hand on her shoulder.

"Breathe, breathe." He told her, he breathed in deep through his nose and out through his mouth.

"Like this, in, and out. Good. Just breathe." He reassured her as she took deep breaths. Her breathing steadied, and she wiped the tears with the back of her hand.

"You alright?" He asked her, his comforting hand still on her shoulder.

"Bad memory, of the bad place and the monsters." She whispered, her voice shaky.

"You don't have to be afraid of the monsters, or the bad men." He squeezed her shoulder reassuringly.

"You're safe now, Deca. You're home."

5. Chapter 5

Deca liked having breakfast with El and Jim. She liked the smell of coffee and French toast. She really liked maple syrup.

"Can Dustin come after school?" She asked him.

"And Mike?" El added, the words muffled by the mouthful of french toast.

"Yeah, fine, but they can't stay too late." He told them both. He was relieved that Deca felt comfortable. After she stopped crying last night she fell asleep quick and didn't stir the rest of the night. He knew because he kept checking in on her.

"You'll have lessons when I get home. And El, give her some stuff to wear." He gulped the last of his coffee. And started putting his khaki shirt on over his thermal. He finished the buttons and shrugged on his coat. He pulled a cigarette out of his back and stuck it between his teeth.

"Be good." He winked and walked out the door. El nodded towards the door and locked it up. El went to her room and came back with a stack of clothes.

Deca grabbed somethings and started putting them on. She put on the pair of white underwear and then the blue jeans, the zipper confused her a bit at first. And she wore a beige long sleeve t-shirt. She also put on the pair of grey wooly socks, she liked them a lot.

She sat on the couch next to El, who was still in her pajamas. El turned on her soaps and was immediately enthralled in them.

Deca got bored and started walking around the cabin. She pulled back the curtain, but the window was boarded up, all of them were.

"Do you want your friends to call you Jane?" Deca asked once the commercials came. El looked at her and bit her lip.

"I don't know. Maybe." El shrugged her shoulders. Deca didn't want to listen to her thoughts but she could tell that the question made El

uncomfortable.

"Can I call you Jane?" Deca asked her.

"Yes. Thanks, Deca." Jane looked up at her. That made her happy, she liked being called Jane. A smile crept onto the corner of her mouth, but it burned bright in her eyes.

Deca understood why it was important to Jane. A name holds so much when you've been called by a number your whole life. The commercials ended and Jane was brought back to the drama of Days of Our Lives.

Deca laid on the orange couch and let out a sigh. She was so bored, she wondered what Dustin was doing at school. He was probably learning something so interesting and he was probable having so much fun.

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Dustin was so bored. He tapped his pencil against his desk and stared down the clock slowly ticking over his English teacher's head. They weren't doing anything, just writing a stupid essay about a stupid poem. His mind kept wandering towards Deca.

He wondered what she was doing, how things went with Hopper after he went home. Hopper was going to be good to her, just like he was with El. This thought made Dustin worry less.

Dustin worried about Will too. He was still in bad shape. The shadow monster was gone but Will's body needed to recover. Things had changed so much since Halloween. The party felt different.

Lucas and Max were practically conjoined, Mike just talked about El or Will. Will was at home. And Dustin felt lonely. He planned on skipping gym and meeting Steve between their two schools again. Steve Harrington had become Dustin's friend, Dustin still thought it was kind of weird.

"Hey, aren't you going to gym?" Lucas asked as Dustin was walking towards the back entrance of the school. Dustin was surprised to see Lucas without his redhead accessory.

"Uhh, I'm gonna be late." Dustin told him and started walking.

"Is it about her? Deca?" Lucas asked, stopping Dustin.

"No, no. I'm just going to skip. Gym sucks." Dustin shrugged his shoulders. Lucas sighed and gave a nod, continuing to his next class.

Dustin was skipping because gym sucks, that wasn't a lie. But also, he wanted to tell Steve about Deca and he wanted to ask Steve for a ride to the cabin after school.

Dustin ran across the high schooler's parking lot. He saw Steve leaning against the hood of his BMW. Dustin ran towards him. His face was still bruised and swollen, but it was more purple than red now.

"Hey, buddy!" Steve called as Dustin walked over, a bit out of breath.

"Hey, Steve." Dustin exhaled, catching his breath.

"Here," Steve tossed him a coke. Dustin nodded in thanks and popped the top. He took a big gulp.

"So, I have something to tell you. Its big." Dustin sat next to Steve on the hood.

"Yeah? Is a girl involved?" Steve raised his eyebrows and smiled shamelessly. Dustin rolled his eyes.

"I have a telepath friend." Dustin said, he was a bit unsure of how to phrase is.

"Eleven, right? She seems cool, intense but cool." Steve shrugged and drank some coke.

"No not Eleven, I found her in the woods the other night. She's so cool. She can read minds and see your memories and can feel what you feel. She's bad ass." Dustin couldn't hide that big smile on his face.

"Ooh, you got it bad." Steve shook his head and smiled.

"I do not." Dustin got defensive.

"No, I get it. Telepath, wow." Steve laughed to himself. Dustin got annoyed.

"It's not like that, asshole, we're friends. And besides she wouldn't like me." Dustin looked away, his voice was low.

"Why not? Why wouldn't she like you?" Steve asked. Dustin was like his kid brother, he liked being able to give him advice.

"I dunno, she's pretty and she's cool. And she's been through a lot." Dustin did like Deca, but he knew she's just his friend.

"Are you kidding? You're a stud and you're funny. Just be confident. Confidence is key." Steve told him.

"It's hard to fake confidence when she can hear my thoughts." Dustin replied.

"Shit, I dunno about flirting with telepaths. Maybe think sweet sappy shit." Steve shrugged his shoulders.

"Like what?" Dustin looked at him with equal curiosity and annoyance.

"I don't know, like, her hair is so pretty. Or wow she's so interesting. Shit like that. If girls could read thoughts that's what they'd want to hear." Steve said. He figured he was right.

"Deca isn't like most girls. She's something else, entirely." Dustin looked up at the blue sky.

"Yeah, no shit. She can read your mind like the paper." Steve chuckle.

"She's nice, like she saw how I felt about Dart and she felt that, and she was sorry. And she understands things, and she cares about people. Like people she doesn't even know because she's seen the pain they've been in." Dustin fell back onto the hood and exhaled. She really was great.

"You've got it bad. Seriously bad." Steve shook his head. Dustin

remained quiet, he didn't disagree with Steve.

"Do you love her?" Steve asked. Dustin thought for a moment.

"Maybe, I've only known her for a few days. I dunno." Dustin said quietly.

"Dustin, you're too young for that shit. Love isn't sweet or soft or nice. It rips you up into a million pieces." Steve fell back onto the hood too and looked at the clouds.

"I don't feel like I'm ripped apart. I feel warm." Dustin replied.

"That's how it starts. Warm and fuzzy, like she puts the air into your lungs. But then it goes bad, real bad." Steve was thinking about Nancy and his fists we're clenched.

"I don't want it to go bad. I don't even know if she likes me." Dustin sat up and looked at him.

"What makes this girl different than the last one? Besides the magic tricks." Steve asked cracking a smile. Dustin rolled his eyes.

"Max was cool and I liked her but its like she didn't even see me. And I tried acting like I didn't care, that only made it worse. So, thanks for that." Dustin shook his head at Steve.

"But, Deca is just so different from anyone I've ever met. She doesn't just see me, she sees into me. She doesn't think I'm a dork, she likes me. I don't know if she likes-likes me. But, she has been through some really bad stuff and she isn't angry, like if I went through that I'd be so angry all the time but she isn't; its like she can see the worst of someone but the little shred of good she finds is enough for her to see the world as good. And she's pretty, like so pretty and she doesn't even realize it." Dustin couldn't hold back his smile. Steve frowned at him. He didn't want Dustin to get hurt.

"Just be her friend. If she doesn't like-like you now, she will. Just be her friend and be there for her. Sometimes its better to be there for them than to be with them." Steve told him and they both stayed really quiet.

"Thanks Steve." Dustin said.

"Anytime, bud." He replied.

"Oh, would you mind picking me up and taking me to see her?" Dustin asked. Steve groaned.

"After school?" He asked.

"Yup." Dustin answered.

"Alright, sure." Steve conceded. Dustin got off the hood and smiled.

"Thanks! I'll meet you here." Dustin called to him as he started walking back towards the school.

Dustin busted into Mr. Clarke's class just as the bell rang. He looked at the seat he usually takes next to Lucas, but Max was sitting there. He rolled his eyes and sat in the seat behind her, Will's.

He looked at Mike and then nodded towards Max, Mike just shrugged his shoulders. Dustin listened to Mr. Clarke's lesson.

"Hey," Dustin whispered to Mike. Mike turned to him.

"I'm going to Hopper's after school. Wanna come?" Dustin asked him.

"I already planned on going. I'm riding there right after school." Mike whispered in reply.

"Steve's driving me. He can drive you too." Dustin said a little louder.

"Dustin, please." Mr. Clarke put his finger to his lips.

"Yes, my lord." Dustin nodded and put his finger to his own lips. Mr. Clarke continued.

"Yeah, I'll go with you." Mike whispered and went back to taking notes. Mr. Clarke's class went by fast, and the final bell rang. Dustin zipped up his backpack and started walking with Mike to the high school lot.

"Hey, Dustin." Max called to him from behind him in the hall. Dustin

turned and let out an annoyed sigh.

"Yeah?" He asked sounding apathetic.

"Why are you going this way? Are you seeing El and Deca?" She asked, she wanted to know them more.

"Yeah, its just me and Mike though." He started walking faster to get away from her. Max wanted to go with, she hated that Mike and Dustin didn't really like her. She wanted to be friends with El and Deca.

Dustin and Mike rushed to the lot and got to Steve's car. Mike winced just looking at Steve's face. They got in his car, Dustin in the front and Mike in the back.

"Hey, you know how to get there right?" Steve asked as he started the car.

"Yeah. Head that way." Dustin waved in the general direction of the cabin. Steve started driving and followed Dustin's directions accordingly. There was an awkward silence looming in the car.

"So, Mike, how's Nanc'?" Steve asked peering at him in the rearview mirror. Mike let out a sigh and an eye roll.

"She's fine. She was at school today." Mike replied hoping his coldness ended the conversation on his sister with her ex-boyfriend. Steve got the message.

"Ok, turn at that oak tree." Dustin pointed, Steve turned the wheel and they skidded down the dirt path. The car screeched to a halt and Steve put the car in park.

"Shit." Dustin sighed. They almost crashed into the mess of dead trees and overgrowth. Mike's eyes were wide as he clutched the front seat.

They got out and started walking. They got to the cabin shortly and stood on the porch.

"El, its me." Mike called while knocking on the door. The locks all sounded at once and the door swung open. El rushed out of the door

and jumped into Mike's arms. Deca listened in on Mike's thoughts.

His mind was clear, he was completely enveloped in El's embrace. His love for her made Deca smile. The feelings were spilling out of him like water, he just wanted to be around her and see that she was safe.

Deca stopped herself from listening. She was blocking out the noise when she heard Dustin's laugh. She immediately smiled and walked towards the open door.

"Hey, Deca!" Dustin smiled at her from over El and Mike. She smiled back, her smile faded a bit when her eyes fell on the tall boy with long hair. She recognized him from Dustin's memories.

El and Mike parted, and the three boys walked into the cabin. Deca wanted to hug Dustin but she didn't want to scare or embarrass him

"Deca, this is Steve." Dustin nodded towards Steve.

"Nice to meet you. Dusty's told me a lot." Steve winked and put his hand out.

"You might not want to." Deca looked down at his hand. Steve's eyebrows raised, and he looked towards Dustin.

"She can see your memories when she touches you." Dustin explained. Steve's eye widened but he nodded and put his hand back to his side.

"So how was Hopper?" Dusitn asked her.

"Nice, good. I'm very thankful for him." Deca told him.

"And you. I'm thankful for you." She added. Dustin's cheeks immediately flushed, he bit his lip trying to hide his smile. Steve raised his eyebrows at Dustin with a grin.

"So, you really see memories?" Steve asked, breaking the silence. Deca nodded.

"Well, I'm inviting you into my brain." Steve rolled up the sleeve of his sweater and held his hand out towards her. Deca hesitated, Jim

said that it was rude. Thoughts were private.

"It's alright, Deca. Not like there's much to see." Dustin said with a smirk. Steve rolled his eyes and jabbed him with an elbow.

Deca exhaled and held Steve's palm with both her hands. The warmth of his skin sent sparks up her fingers. The energy moved up her arms like waves and she felt herself being pulled into the current of his mind.

She was swarmed by his thoughts and emotions. She was dragged through memories of sports and friends and school and being home. There was so much solitude and pain. For ever party surrounded by peers holding red cups there was nights full of choking on tears silently in his dark room.

There was a light when Nancy came. Her beauty brought the sun back and she was smart and real. He loved her a lot, when he thought of the future he pictured her. That night in the bathroom on Halloween changed everything.

He punched his steering wheel; the tears burned his eyes. He wanted to hate her, but he felt guilty. The guilt and the pain were crippling. He kept it all in, nothing got out and it kept building up. The day he bought flowers he just wanted her back. He wanted her voice to fill the silence ringing in his ears.

Someone else filled that silence, it was Dustin. They hunted Dart and fought demodogs and they burned the tunnels. They became close, like brothers, like friends. Steve shared his wisdom and Dustin made him laugh. He didn't feel guilty anymore, he felt good.

When he fought with Billy Hargrove there wasn't anger or fear. There was a strong feeling of survival, of protection. He was protecting those kids, his friends. He took the punches and got hit with a dinner plate and a minor concussion. He didn't regret it at all, he wanted to keep them safe.

Steve was alone again. Seeing the way Nancy and Johnathan look at each other stings a bit but he thinks they deserve to be happy. He wants everyone to be happy, there's too much pain. He wants to

protect Dustin from the pain. *He's too young for that shit.*

Deca let's go of his wrist and could feel the tickles in her nostril. She looks up at Steve, her eyes lingering on the bruises. She can still feel the blows from Billy's fists on her cheekbone.

She reaches for the tissue in the pocket of her jeans. She dabbed the blood that started to trickle out of her left nostril.

"Are you alright?" Steve asked, he looked concerned. He wondered what she saw.

"I'm sorry." Deca spoke to him softly.

"For all the pain." She clarified. Steve smiled with the side of his mouth. He knew what she saw, he felt a bit embarrassed that someone saw him like that.

"Not embarrassing. Strong. Pain gives you strength." Deca said to him. He nodded and repeated the words in his head. He saw why Dustin was crushing on her, she was wise and strong and kind.

"Tell me about school. What did you learn?" Deca asked, turning towards Dustin.

"Uhmm, nothing really. I couldn't focus. But they weren't teaching anything exciting anyway." Dustin smiled.

"But you like school." Deca's brow furrowed. She wondered how it could be boring if he liked it.

"Yeah, I like to learn but when there isn't learning I don't like it." He explained. Deca nodded, his explanation made sense to her.

"What did you guys do today?" Dustin asked her.

"Jane and I watched soaps. Everyone is angry, and they have secrets. But everyone else already knows their secrets." Deca explained. She wasn't sure how she felt about soaps yet, but Jane liked them.

"Jane?" Dustin asked.

"El's mama called her Jane. I call her Jane." Deca replied. Dustin and Steve nodded. Deca looked over and saw that Mike and Jane gazed in silence. Jane looked towards the floor.

"You have a mom?" Mike asked her. Jane nodded in reply.

"Where is she? Are you going to go live with her?" Mike asked again, his fear causing his voice to crack.

"Mama is- "Jane thought about what to say. She couldn't find the right words.

"Mama is gone." She frowned at mike. She remembered Jim telling her that her mama was gone.

"I'm sorry, El." Mike embraced her. Mike immediately flushed.

"I mean Jane, you're Jane." He said as Jane hugged him back.

"I'm El to you." She whispered to him. She squeezed his shoulders and nestled her head in the crook of his neck.

Deca watched them hold each other tight. She smiled at the warm feeling they sent out. She closed her eyes and she could feel their arms around her. She relished in that feeling.

She looked at Dustin and threw her arms around him. She squeezed his neck and rested her head against his. He tensed up and wasn't sure what to do.

"Just hold me too." She whispered to him. He put his arms around her cautiously. He held her tighter. Deca liked the feeling of the pressure on her ribs. She liked hugs, she liked to be held.

She let go of Dustin, she smiled when she saw how red his cheeks were. Deca looked towards Steve, his smirk was distorted by his busted lip.

Deca reached up and touched Steve's hair. Steve stiffened. She pulled her hand away and touched her own auburn locks.

"Pretty." She said to him. This made Dustin cackle and Steve just gave

a nod in thanks. Deca felt lucky to have good friends. She cared about them and she felt so happy that she was safe and with people who were good.

AN: I hope you liked this chapter. I thought it would be fun to see Deca and Dustin apart. Also, I loved writing the Steve and Dustin bits. Thanks for reading!

6. Chapter 6

She struggled with reading aloud, more than anything. The words jumbled in her head before they made it to her mouth. Deca huffed and puffed in frustration, she didn't like not being good at this. Jim was so patient, he sat with her and encouraged her as she went through the dictionary.

"Did Jane have trouble?" Deca asked him. Jane was by herself on the couch reading one of the books with the gold spine.

"Of course, readings hard for anyone just starting. Take it slow, sound them out. Don't worry about me, just focus on the words." He gave a small smile, he gave her confidence. She nodded and continued on the word she had been working on for more than two minutes.

"Bo-bom-bom." She started to stutter, her cheeks flushed.

"Bom-bombard." She exhaled the word after it had been stuck in her throat for what seemed like hours.

"Great job, kid." Jim exclaimed, as he patted her back. Deca's cheeks were pulled back into a wide grin, she was so relieved.

"More." She said as she started on the next word.

Deca and Jim sat for another hour, she struggled with some words and others she picked up instantly. He praised her and encouraged her when she got frustrated. Jane kept looking over at them from her books.

"Can I be done?" Jane called to him from the couch.

"How many?" He asked.

"Three, four soon." She replied.

"Finish that one and we're square." He told her. She nodded and continued reading about Peter Rabbit.

After she was finished she went over to the kitchen table and sat

across from them. Jane let out a sigh, Jim and Deca looked up at her.

"You ok?" Jim asked. Deca frowned. She tried her hardest to shut out Jane's thoughts, but she couldn't help feeling her energy. Jane's sour mood filled the cabin and encircled Deca like smoke.

"Hungry." Jane replied.

"Oh, its already 8:30. I'll get dinner going, you two wash up." Jim said getting up, tossing an empty beer can into the bin on his way to the freezer.

Deca and Jane both walked towards the bathroom. Jim found himself in a good mood, he left work early and it was a sunny day. He thought Deca was a good addition, she wasn't as rebellious as Jane and she had a good attitude.

He put the three potpies in the oven and grabbed another beer. He could hear the girls washing their hands. He dropped onto the sofa and couldn't help himself from grinning.

Deca joined him on the sofa. She was still sleeping on the couch, he called a guy at the furniture store he went to high school with. The guy got him a pretty good deal on a little twin bed, he was going to pick it up tomorrow.

Jane came out of the bathroom and rolled her eyes. She sat on the other couch and pulled her knees to her chest. She had been moody all day, but that wasn't out of the ordinary for her. He told her last night that Mike couldn't come over. She was still weak from the gate and needed rest, and he didn't like kids coming over unsupervised.

Deca felt tired, her head pounded from constantly trying to shut out their voices. Listening to people's thoughts was second nature, she finally let go and let Jane's thoughts fill her mind. Her stomach dropped when she heard what she was thinking.

Mouthbreathers. Jane thought as she looked over at Deca and Jim. She rolled her eyes. She didn't like that Jim was spending so much time with Deca. Jane was angry, she felt ignored all day. She was mad at him for not letting Mike over and she wanted him to do lessons with

her.

Deca got up and went to the bathroom. She sat on the side of the tub and felt guilty. This was Jane's home and Deca was intruding. She was sad that she couldn't see Dustin, but she knew Jim was just trying to protect them, Jane especially.

The timer on the oven dinged and Deca could hear Jim get up to take the pies out. She didn't want to go out, she wanted to sit on the floor and never let Jane see her again. Jane was her sister, it killed her that she was upset with her.

"Tell Deca food's ready." Jim told Jane. She sighed and got up. She knocked on the door. Deca didn't answer, she didn't want to upset her anymore.

"Food's ready." Jane said, she turned away and started walking towards the table. Deca just sat on the floor with her knees to her chest. She felt awful, Jane was hurting because of her.

Jim put the pies on the table and Jane grabbed the forks off the counter and set them down in three places. They sat down and started eating.

"Mike can come over tomorrow. But you've gotta stick to the rules. No outside." He told her, she raised her head and smiled. She nodded and took a bite. Jim knew the Wheeler kid was good, but he didn't like how risky it was to have him over while Jim was at work.

"Deca, it's gonna get cold." Jim called. He took another bite and then he just got a terrible feeling. It hit him in the gut like battering ram. He got up and knocked on the door. He didn't get an answer, he knocked again, harder.

"Deca, everything ok?" He asked. He tried the door knob and it was locked. He looked towards Jane, her eyes were wide.

"Do the lock." He told her, she nodded and raised her hand. She focused on the doorknob and the lock clicked.

Jim opened the door and saw that the bathroom was empty. His heart dropped. He looked behind the tub, he pushed Jane's door open

and looked around her room. He looked in his own room, even the closet. He was frantic.

"She's gone." He repeated a few times as he paced around the house. He went back to the bathroom and noticed the window was open. He squeezed his fist and ran towards the door.

"Go to your room, lock the door." He told Jane, she did as she was told. He grabbed his gun and flashlight from his belt and ran outside.

"Deca?" He called out, he held his revolver forward, his other hand holding the flashlight. He walked around the side of the cabin. He stood in front of the bathroom window. It wasn't very high up but he still wondered if someone climbed up there to get her.

Maybe she ran away. A voice in the back of his head ringed. He feared that she was lost in the woods. *Things were going fine*, he thought, *why would she run?*

It rained today, the soil was still a bit damp. There was a foot print in the mud, it was a small foot, Deca's. It pointed towards the back of the cabin. He walked forward, pistols still drawn. He took cautious steps, trying to not make noise.

He turned the corner and saw nothing. He pointed his flashlight at the ground looking for prints. He didn't see any. He growled in anger. He put his flashlight up and looked around him.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw something white. He turned towards it and saw that it was Deca. Sitting on the ground in her white long sleeved tshirt. She was turned away from him, hugging her knees.

"Deca," He let out a sigh of relief. She didn't turn towards him. He walked towards her and knelt next to her. She looked up at him frowning, tears on her cheeks.

"Why'd you run out? You scared the hell out of me." He tried to keep his voice low but he was angry.

"She is hurting, I'm hurting her." She replied. Jim was confused, he didn't know what that meant.

"Jane is hurting, it makes her sad to see you giving me lessons. She wants to be her with you, she doesn't want me here." Deca's voice shook.

"That's not true." Jim said.

"It is, I can hear it. She is jel-jealous." Deca said remembering one of the hard words she'd read.

"You keep going in people's heads, sometimes you won't like what you hear." He told her.

"I try hard to shut you out, but it makes my head hurt. I can't help that I listen." She sniffled. Jim didn't know how to reply.

"You are good, she loves you a lot." Deca told him, he nodded. It meant a lot for him to hear that.

"El is stubborn and sometimes a real brat, but she isn't angry at you. She cares about you, she begged for you to stay with us. She's just in a mood. You aren't going anywhere." Jim gave a smile and patted her back.

Deca looked into his eyes, he was genuine. She wanted to see his memories, she wanted to see his past. She put her hand up and inched towards his face, he stiffened and watched her trembling palm move towards him.

He was going to let her look in his mind. It was like her hand moved in slow motion. He wondered what she's see, he wondered how she'd look at him after she saw everything. He didn't know what stopped him, but he backed away and stood up.

"Let's get you inside before you freeze." He said, she pulled her hand back and nodded. They walked back into the cabin, both sighing in relief of the warmth.

"You ran?" Jane asked, standing in front of the kitchen table. Deca shrugged her shoulders.

"Let's eat, dinner's probably already cold." Jim said breaking the tension between the girls, he put his gun back in his belt sitting by

the door. They both nodded and took their seats at the table.

They all ate fast, Jim chugged down half his beer before he touched the pie. The silence was weighing down the room. Deca was tired and didn't bother blocking out their thoughts. She wanted to apologize to Jim, he was afraid.

Jane was worried, she knew she was being cold towards Deca all day, but she didn't think Deca would run. She wondered if she should say something but just quietly ate.

"Mike can come over tomorrow, its Saturday so he can be over all day if he wants." Jim said, this made Jane smile and her eyes widen.

"All the other kids too, I'll be working late, and I know you two will get bored." He added, this made Deca grin.

"We follow the rules even with friends over, though. Just stay in watch TV, play chess or whatever those kids are into." Jim warned. This made Deca giggle, the party played D&D not chess.

"Thank you, Jim." Deca smiled at him. He nodded and took a bite.

"Is Will better yet?" Jane asked.

"He's still resting, but Joyce says he's doing good. I'll check in tomorrow, just to see." He said thinking of his phone calls to Joyce. He called her at least twice a day, he was worried about Will but also about her.

Deca tried desperately to hide her smile. Her jaw started to ache, she bit her bottom lip and tried to focus on her food.

"What?" Jim asked with a mouth full, shrugging in his shoulders. This made her let out a giggle. She tried to contain herself. She took steady breaths, but a grin was stuck on her face.

"Nothing." She replied finally composing herself. She shook her head and just giggled inside her head. She thought it was funny how different Jim's thoughts were when Joyce came up.

After dinner they all got ready for bed. Jim had got Deca her own

toothbrush, she liked the taste of toothpaste and the way it made her mouth tingle. Jim made funny noises when he used the mouthwash.

"Can I listen to the story too?" Deca asked after she and Jane got into their pajamas. Jim nodded and then looked towards Jane. Jane nodded and smiled with the side of her mouth.

I'm sorry for being a brat. Jane thought as she held eye contact with Deca. Deca gave a small nod and smile in response. She felt Jane's guilt and her shame. She was scared that Deca ran away or was taken by the bad men.

Deca exhaled and stepped towards Jane, she put her arms around her and squeezed tight. She needed a hug and she knew that Jane needed one too. Jane was stiff at first, but she gave in and squeezed Deca back.

"Alright, let's get settled." Jim said trying to stay serious. It warmed his heart to see their wordless reconciliation. He had a feeling in his chest, it was warm, he remembered this feeling. It was family. He looked down at the little girls that held more power in their small frames than anyone he'd ever met. He was proud to call them his family, he felt lucky.

Deca released Jane and turned towards Jim. She put her arms around him and rested her head just below his heart. She could hear the thumping. His arms laid stiff at his sides at first but then he surrounded her in a big hug like a bear.

Jane joined in and put one arm around Deca and the other around Jim. Deca felt the tears start welling up and she let them fall, the feeling of love and strength and belonging was overwhelming. She had seen so much pain and sadness and hate, she had been overwhelmed by those feelings too, but this was different. She felt whole, like this feeling was going to start spilling out of her ears.

Their hug ended, and Jane went to get into bed. Deca turned and went to lay on the couch. She nestled her head into the pillow and tucked the quilt under her chin.

"Aren't you going to come listen to the story?" Jim asked from Jane's

doorway.

"Don't need to. I'm happy." She replied, her eyes closed. She heard Jim's heavy footsteps come towards her.

"Want me to tuck you in?" He asked kneeling down next to her.

"Sure." She replied looking at him, she had never been tucked in before. He nodded and put his hands on either side of her, tucking the quilt under her. She felt like she was being swaddled like a baby, she liked it though.

"Thank you, Jim." She said with a small smile.

"Anytime, Dec'." He replied.

"Jim," She said as he stepped towards Jane's rooms.

"Yeah?" He asked turning around.

"I'm proud to be your family too." She spoke the words with certainty. He looked at her for a moment and just gave a small smile with the side of his mouth. He gave a nod and went into Jane's room to read to her.

AN: I hope you liked this chapter. Leave me a review if you have any suggestions for future chapters. Thanks for reading!

7. Chapter 7

I don't own anything.

Mike could barely sleep. The thought of being able to spend the day with El made his stomach flutter. When he got her call, he couldn't say yes fast enough. He still felt like she wasn't real, like she was still gone. She only felt real when she was right in front of him.

His cheeks burned when he had thoughts like this. He couldn't imagine telling El these things, he was sure he'd make a fool of himself. He laid in his bed and stared at the ceiling. He couldn't wait for the morning. He closed his eyes and went back to the moments with her.

He went back to the first day they got to be together since she closed the gate. It was the next day, she was so tired. She didn't even know he was there, but he sat on the Byers' floor and watched her sleep. He sat and watched every rise and fall of her chest, every flare of her nostril.

He had cried that night. When everyone else was asleep and he was curled up on the Byer's living room floor with an old quilt that smelt like cigarettes and moth balls. He was relieved that El was safe, and so was Will and the Mind Flayer was gone. Everyone he cared about was safe, they didn't have to be afraid anymore, but he still cried. It was like it had been building up and had to fall.

Mike started falling asleep. The sound of his walkie jolted him from sleep.

"Mike?" He could hear El's whisper through the static. He flipped onto his other side and grabbed the walkie off his nightstand.

"El? Are you ok? Over." He asked with urgency.

"I miss you." She replied, he could hear the small smile in her voice.

"I'll be there tomorrow, first thing. Over." He told her.

"Are you tired?" She whispered, the static made her voice difficult to

hear.

"A little, are you? Over." He asked.

"No, excited to see you. And my friends." She said quietly with a bit of a giggle.

"You should sleep, it won't be good if you're tired tomorrow. We'll have all day." Mike assured her. The line went silent for a moment.

"Ok, Mike. Good night." She said, he could picture her frown.

"Night, El. Over and out." He turned off his walkie and put it back on the night stand. He couldn't stop smiling. Just hearing her voice made him smile. He put his hands behind his head and stared up at his dark ceiling. His cheeks started to ache. He fell asleep.

He jolted awake from the sound of his alarm clock. He turned it off and sat up in bed. Mike yawned and rubbed his eyes. He thought he might have dreamt of El, of what she looked like during the summer. At dusk, in the backyard with the greenish-yellow blinks of fireflies and the golden sunset shining off her cheekbone.

He got up and got ready to go. He found himself comparing different sweatshirts, one was black and the other was navy blue and he started to flush. He felt so stupid, he knew El could care less about any of these things. He picked the blue one and ran downstairs.

"Michael, do you want eggs?" His mom asked from the kitchen counter.

"No, thanks, I'll just have an eggo." He said going to the freezer. He put one in the toaster and went to get his backpack from the basement. When he got back upstairs, baby Holly was eating a waffle cut into pieces. He went to the toaster and saw that his was gone.

"Mom," Mike groaned.

"Put another one in. You're having eggs too." His mother rolled her eyes. He huffed and retrieved another eggo from the freezer.

His mom brought him a plate with scrambled eggs and a warm

waffle. He gave a quick thanks and poured syrup over his plate. He scarfed down her breakfast and quickly went out the front door. He mounted his bike and started riding towards El and Hopper's cabin.

The ride went by fast. He was walking through the woods when he noticed that little snowflakes were falling around him. When he got to the cabin his hands felt frozen.

He raised his hand to knock but the door swung open. El stood there smiling. She moved for him to walk inside. He couldn't stop himself from grinning.

"Morning." Hopper said curtly, bringing his coffee up for a drink. Deca sat next to him, a smile spread across her lips.

"Good morning, Chief. And you too, Deca." Mike gave a small smile.

"Good morning, Mike. And goodbye, Jim." Deca said with a wide grin. Hopper lowered his brows at her but broke into a small smile which surprised Mike.

"I'm going, but the rules still apply. And you both finish your breakfast." Hopper ordered while putting on his coat.

"Can me and Dustin read more dicti-dictionary?" Deca asked picking up her fork.

"Sure, but just no going outside." He nodded and put his hat on. Deca happily ate her scrambled eggs. El looked at him with the most honest smile he'd ever seen.

Hopper walked outside and closed the door behind him. El glared at the door and with a small tilt of her head all the locks clicked. She walked over and sat on the sofa, she patted the cushion next to her.

He happily took the seat, she smelt like shampoo. He tried not to think about how she smelt, he looked over at Deca who ate her eggs with a smile. She saw him looking at her and frowned.

She got up and cleared her plate into the trash and went into El's room and closed the door. He breathed out relief.

"What's wrong?" El asked him, looking concerned.

"Nothing, its just hard to talk to you knowing she's reading my mind." He didn't mean to sound annoyed.

"Deca tries to block you out. She can't control it." El sounded defensive, he had never really heard her talk like that.

"You can control your powers." He said trying to reason.

"Different type of power, she can't help hearing things or feeling things. It hurts her." She said softly. Mike was flooded with guilt.

"Why don't you want to be her friend? She's good." She frowned.

"I just- I don't trust her. We barely know her and she's in your house." He replied.

"You didn't know me, and you brought me to your house." She reminded him.

"But that was different, you needed help." He could feel his cheeks burn red.

"She needs more help. She was there longer. She knows everyone's pain, she feels it and it hurts her and it stays inside, and it festers. She felt your pain, try to feel hers." El was explaining it to him the way he explains things to her.

He just sat quietly. He didn't know what to say. El had changed so much, she was different now. She knew so much now. He was different too, he now knew what it was like to lose something important.

When El disappeared, it was like his heart went with her. For a year, he walked around with a hole in his chest. Now she was back and alive, but things were different, so different.

He watched El turn on the TV with a tilt of her head and the sudden sound of Days of Our Lives made him flinch.

"Soaps, huh?" He asked with a smile.

"My favorite." She gave a small smile, her eyes stayed on the screen.

"My mom watches them. I always thought they were cheesy." He said, trying to get her to talk to him.

"No, sometimes its sad, or surprising, or pretty. Like when Roman and Marlena kiss." El smiled. Mike loved the way her eyes lit up as she talked about them.

He scooted next to her until their shoulders touched. Mike felt his heart flutter, he could feel her shoulders rise and fall with each breath, he closed his eyes and inhaled the smell of her apple shampoo and the faintest scent of cigarette smoke clinging to the blanket laying over their laps. They started watching Days.

Not very far into the episode Deca shot through El's bedroom door and raced to the front door of the cabin. El and Mike's eyes followed her.

She swung open the door and stepped onto the porch, the leaf covered porch cold on her bare feet.

"Dustin!" She swung her arms out and wrapped him in a big hug. She was so happy that he was there. Before he could say anything, she grabbed his hand and pulled him into the cabin.

"Deca! Slow down." He laughed as she locked the door.

"Its been so long. I missed you." A wide grin was spread across her face.

Dustin couldn't stop smiling, and he tried very hard to relax his cheeks. He turned and saw El and Mike staring at them. He gave a small nod and looked back at Deca, who smiled at him like there was nothing else in the world.

"Want to see?" She put her hand out. He nodded and took her hand in his, he watched her face. She didn't react to his sweaty palm.

His view of her was interrupted by flashes of El and Chief Hopper. He was helping her read the dictionary. Her and El were sitting together. Then they were hugging. She was laying on the couch falling asleep

and felt so warm, so whole.

His sight returned when she pulled her hand back.

"How do you do that?" He asked.

"I don't know. Instead of searching, I think of my memory." She said plainly.

"I'm glad you're happy here." He told her. She smiled and nodded sincerely. He remembered that he had a gift for her and took off his backpack to get it.

"What is it?" She asked, excited to see.

"X-Men #101, the first time we meet Jean Grey. They call her Marvel Girl. She's like you and El." He said handing her the comic book. She took it and started flipping through it.

"I can read it with you if you want, help you with some of the bigger words." He added.

"Yes, can we?" She asked smiling.

They sat at the table and read for a while. When she came across a word, she didn't know she paused and listened to Dustin reading in his head.

"You're doing really good. Chief's a good teacher." Dustin said with a small laugh as she turned the page.

"You're helping me to." Deca smiled at him.

"I haven't had to help you yet." He replied.

"When I don't know the word, I listen to you read it." She told him and continued reading aloud.

"Hey, that's cheating." Dustin interrupted.

"Cheating?" She asked.

"It's like doing something to win a game that isn't fair to the other

person." He tried to think of how to explain it.

"We aren't playing a game." She tilted her head, a bit confused.

"You can't get the answer out of someone else's head just because you don't know it. You have to try to get the answer yourself." He said trying to make sense to her.

"But I did get the answer." She replied.

"By looking in *my* head." He tried to be patient, but it was a little frustrating.

Deca gave a deep sigh.

"I'm not allowed to listen, now I can't get answers. No one knows how hard it is not to listen." She closed the comic book and pulled her knees to her chest.

"How *do* you read minds? How do you block it out?" He asked, before he was never sure if he could ask her.

"I don't have to do anything to listen, its just like hearing someone talk. I can't control what I hear or feel. I have to focus on one person to see what they're thinking, and I have to really focus to go into memories they aren't thinking about." She said softly, she struggled to find the right words.

"To block out thoughts I have to focus on something else. When there's more than one person its hard to understand everyone at once and its easier to ignore them when I can focus on a different noise." She continued.

"I don't hear you while I read, but if I need to know a word I stop and listen to you read it. I didn't hear Jane today because tv made it quiet." She hoped she explained it right. Dustin nodded slowly.

"Why do you need to touch someone? To, you know, get inside their memories?" Mike asked, breaking the silence.

"Makes us close, makes a bond. Closer I am the more I see. When I touch them, it quiets everything else." She told him.

"Did you see inside Papa?" Jane asked softly. Deca felt herself being pulled into an old memory.

She sat cross legged on her small cot. She was tracing the lines of her palm with her fingertip just to pass the time.

The door to her room opened abruptly and the men dressed in white wearing the bulky headphones stomped in. One of them hit the button on the small controller clipped to his belt.

A deafening sound blaring from the speakers around her room caused her to scream clutching her ears as hard as she could. They grabbed her arms with their large gloved hands and pulled her from the bed.

She didn't bother to fight them. The pain caused by the blood curdling screech paralyzed her. The sound made her feel like her skull was vibrating and her ear drums were bursting with every sound wave.

The sound continued to terrorize her as they carried her down the hall. She screamed and struggled.

One of them swiped their ID card in front of the door and kicked it open. They dropped her on the metal chair and walked out.

When the door closed behind him the sound stopped. Her arms fell into her lap, she hunched over resting her head in her hands and tried to catch her breath.

No matter how many times she heard that sound she never built a tolerance to it. When she started to be able to go inside their minds from afar they tried out different things, different sounds but this frequency was the most traumatic.

She had composed herself and sat straight in the chair. She looked across the room to the window. Papa stood at the desk in the other room, the room attached to the one she sat it. She looked at him

The door opened, she turned towards it and saw a man wheeling in the evaluation cart.

He was tall, bald, heavy, and his mouth was twisted into a permanent

frown. He wore a white coat and black slacks, he had a cattle prod attached to his belt.

The room was filled with his thoughts, or lack thereof. All he was thinking about was the set up of the equipment. He avoided eye contact and corrected his thoughts when they began to wander.

He slipped the head gear on, it was cold against her scalp. He sat in the chair across the table from her.

"Ten," Papa's voice rang through her sore ears from the speaker in the top corner. She sat up more in her seat.

"I need you to answer some questions today." He spoke softly. She nodded and began focusing on the man in front of her.

"What color is he thinking of?" Papa asked.

She didn't have to try very hard. *Blue, blue, blue, blue.* His repetition filled her ears.

"Blue." She answered quickly.

"Good, Ten. He's picturing an image. Describe the image." Papa ordered.

She focused harder on his eyes. She could feel his unease. She saw flashes of it, only glimpses. The moment she could see a part of it clearly the rest would fade. It was frustrating her.

She reached her hand towards him. He flinched away.

"Ten. No contact." Papa scolded. She trembled at his sternness.

"It's a crutch. You must use your mind. Concentrate, focus on the image." His voice softened. She nodded at his words.

With a deep exhale she focused harder. She pushed herself into his mind. She could see the image, but she felt her throat close before she could describe it to Papa. She felt her palms trembling and her stomach twist.

She had passed by the image she was meant to see and was seeing flashes of the man's life. He was alone. The loneliness encircled her like smoke. She saw flashes of his reflection, the dark rings under his eyes even darker, the fluorescent light flickering, the smell of him burned her nostrils.

She couldn't stop herself. She saw even further. She could see a woman walking out a door, suitcases in each hand, there was yelling. The yelling blended together into an incoherent jumble.

She saw him with the same woman. There was more yelling. She could taste the burning, rancid taste that clung to his mouth. He was screaming at the woman, she was yelling back. He grabbed her wrist, he was hitting her. She could feel her own knuckles aching and wanted to stop.

She was pulled from his mind by the electricity traveling through her side. She fell off the chair, the head gear was yanked off as she hit the ground.

He jabbed the cattle prod into her hip. The prongs seared into her skin and made her muscles contract. She couldn't stop the spasms or the cries she let out.

"No more! I'm not doing this again!" The man yelled at Papa and slammed his palm against the large window.

He stormed out of the room not bothering to take the cart with him. She laid on the ground breathless, the floor felt cold against her burning cheek.

"Ten, what did you see?" Papa asked softly as he came into the room. He knelt on the ground in front of her.

"Papa," She began, but was too weak to say the words.

He touched her face; his cotton gloved fingers stroked her forehead.

She slowly raised her hand to his cheek. He froze, unsure how to react.

When she placed her palm on his cheek, she remembered the images

inside the man's head. She replayed them in her mind, for Papa this time.

She watched as his eyes dilate. They darted back and forth while he watched the memories she'd intruded on.

His pupils contracted as his vision returned. He looked at her with awe. He slowly moved both his hand up to her head. His thumbs stroked her temples. She closed her eyes, letting the tears fall. She felt the blood start to drip down onto lip, but she didn't care.

That was the last time she felt love from Papa. Or whatever that was that he felt towards her, she reminded herself. She knew real love now. She sees it between the party, between Jim and Jane, between Jane and Mike.

Papa never had love for her, or Jane, or any of the children they stole. Deca now understood that.

"Never saw inside Papa. Too much darkness to see through." She told them.

AN: Sorry for such a long wait. I really struggled with writing that flashback, I wanted to get it right. I like how it turned out, I hope you do too. Thanks for reading!

8. Chapter 8

Sorry for such a long wait, with school and work I'll probably be posting once a week, if anyone cares. Again, I don't own anything. Enjoy!

Also this is a continuation of the previous chapter, after her flashback.

As the day went on the mood lightened. It was noon, the midday sun flooded through the boards on the windows.

Dustin took his Walkman out of his backpack.

"Want to listen?" He asked holding out the headphones.

"To what?" Deca was unsure of the rectangle he held out.

"Its like a little radio, it plays music. The sound goes right into your ears, it blocks out all the other noise." He said.

Might help block out everyone's thoughts.

She nodded, hoping it would work. She took the headphones and slowly put them over her ears.

Dustin smiled widely as he hit the play button.

She flinched at the loudness, he quickly apologized and lowered it.

She listened with wide eyes. The song's beginning startled her but once she adjusted to it she found herself moving her head along to the beat.

He nodded his head with her, and a grin was spread across his face.

"I think I'm turning Japanese, I think I'm turning Japanese..." Blared in her ears. By the second chorus she was moving her lips along with the words being chanted.

Her lips stopped moving and her head stopped bobbing when she

realized something. She couldn't hear any of them.

She relished in not being able to hear them. Blocking them out made her head hurt, the music felt good.

She stood up and took Dustin's hand and held the Walkman with her other. She began jumping around to the beat of the song. He laughed but she couldn't hear it.

The song drummed to an end and the thoughts rushed to her ears. She didn't mind it, she was happy.

She breathlessly fell back into the chair and pulled the headphones off.

"So, you like music?" Dustin asked grinning. She nodded eagerly.

He had different mixtapes to choose from. He told her about each one. He was excited she liked it, he fell over his words at times because of his enthusiasm working faster than his mouth.

"This song is really good. It's from ghostbusters." He told her as he took the old tape out.

"Halloween." She remembered. He nodded and slid in the new cassette. He hit play.

The music was eerie at first but when the beat kicked in, she involuntarily nodded her head to it.

Dustin looked at her from across the table. He couldn't hear it but still mouthed the words.

She liked music, she liked it more because it was a piece of Dustin she could see and experience without invading his head.

She listened to more songs, before each one he would pause and explain them.

Before one song he whispered her the name.

"Why don't you want Mike to know the song?" She asked curious.

Mike turned from his conversation with Jane. Dustin's cheeks got red.

"What song is it?" Mike asked, just as curious.

"Wake Me Up Before You Go Go." He said softly.

"Oh. Wham!, really?" Mike shrugged his shoulders trying to contain his amusement.

"What's Wham!?" Jane asked Mike. His tried to think of a way to explain.

"Mike thinks it is for girls." Deca told her. Dustin and Mike both started laughing. Deca laughed but was still confused.

"It's pop, mostly girls like their songs. But they're good." Dustin chuckled.

He played the song. She liked it. It was fast, it made her feet move on their own.

She had listened to more songs. Despite the noise being blown into her ears, she had never known quiet like this.

Before when there was no voices or thoughts to hear, it was because she was locked away in the little cement room. The silence was deafening and made her mind spin in circles.

She liked this kind of quiet better. She liked being able to have a say in when she could listen to people, she liked having that control.

The current song was slower, over the beat she heard a knock at the door. All of them froze.

"I think its Lucas." Dustin whispered.

"Who is it?" Mike asked in a hushed tone as he walked towards the door.

"Lucas." He yelled through the door. Everyone breathed relief as Mike opened it.

They all greeted him. Deca took her headphones off to say hello. She noticed Dustin was pleasantly surprised at Lucas' solitaire.

"No Max today?" He asked Lucas.

"Her mom was taking her somewhere." He shrugged.

Lucas brought board games with him. Him and Mike argued over which to play.

Mike wanted to play Monopoly. Lucas argued that it goes on for too long and will be hard to explain.

Lucas wanted to play The Game of Life. Mike argued it was too short and for little kids.

They played rock-paper-scissors. They tied three times. They both put their fists down and groaned.

"What about something else?" Jane asked breaking the tension.

"Like what?" Lucas and Mike asked in unison.

"Not board game. Just us." She said. Deca smiled, she knew what she had in mind.

Jane pushed the couch back with a small nod. Dustin had to correct himself, his mouth hung open. It never stopped catching him by surprise. They all sat in a circle on the floor.

Deca was between Dustin and Jane, across from Lucas.

She asked if there was a game to play where it was just them.

Lucas suggested Truth or Dare. Mike objected but everyone else agreed.

He explained the game to Deca and Jane.

"Who goes first?" Dustin asked grinning.

"I will." Jane said.

"Alright, truth or dare?" Lucas asked.

"Dare."

"Ok, well, I dare you to hold your breath for as long as you can."

She nodded and took a deep breath in, her cheeks puffed out.

Mike kept count on his watch, notifying her in ten second intervals. Her cheeks were starting to turn pink.

"58, 59, 60, 61." All of them chanted the numbers in unison. Jane finally conceded and took a deep breath. Everyone chuckled as she smiled breathlessly.

"Deca, your turn." Dustin told her. She nodded.

"Truth or dare?"

"Dare." She answered confidently, excited for what she'd do. They all thought for a moment, unsure of what to assign her.

"I dare you read Lucas' mind." Dustin grinned.

"No way. That's breaking a rule." Lucas said.

"What rule is it breaking? I guarantee there is no truth or dare rules for mind reading." Dustin replied.

"She can already read minds, that's like daring her to blink or something. Pick something else." Lucas scolded him.

"I dare you to eat something gross from the fridge." Dustin said. She shrugged her shoulders and stood up. She walked over to the fridge and opened it.

"What's gross?" She asked seeking guidance. Lucas got up and walked over. He peered into the fridge before he stopped and reached towards the yellow jar.

"Jack pot. Mustard." He held it up for the others to see. Mike made a sour face.

"That's not that gross." Dustin said, trying to make Deca not worry about it.

"Not gross? Do you regularly eat spoonfuls of mustard?" Lucas asked raising his eyebrows.

Deca didn't know what mustard was. She grabbed a spoon from the drawer and took the jar from Lucas.

When she twisted open the jar her nostrils were insulted by the sour, spicy odor.

She dipped her spoon in. She held her breath and put it in her mouth.

She didn't enjoy it, it tasted bad. She could feel her nose wrinkle and her jaw clench and one eye squint. She struggled to swallow it, partly because of the taste but also because of the laughing she tried to hold back.

She could see how silly she looked in their eyes, her face twisted and pulled away from the awful taste. She started to swallow, the heat of her mouth made the mustard cover her tongue in the most unpleasant way.

She managed to swallow it, her shoulders tensed and face contorted as she got it down. Dustin applauded her. She sat back in the circle. It was Dustin's turn.

His thoughts were loud, truth or dare made him nervous. His anxiety swarmed her. Deca felt her palms start to sweat and her throat to dry. Her stomach twisted and turned.

"Dustin, truth or dare?" Mike asked.

He hesitated, like his tongue was knotted. He struggled to untie it.

"Da-I mean truth. Truth." He corrected.

"Truth? Not fun." Jane teased. His cheeks reddened. Deca hummed to herself to block out his nervous thoughts.

"Do you like-"Lucas began, a menacing smirk across his lips.

"School!" Mike interrupted.

"Do you like school?" He asked trying to steady his voice. He wanted to spare Dustin any type of embarrassment, especially in front of Deca.

When Mike noticed she was looking at him, he looked towards the ground and thought vividly about the olive-green rug. She smiled to herself at the way he protected Dustin. Though she wasn't sure what he was protecting him from, Lucas was going to ask about Deca. She knew Dustin already liked her, he was her friend.

"Yeah, I like school." Dustin chuckled but breathed relief that the question didn't regard Deca.

"Lucas, truth or dare?" He turned his attention to the boy next to him.

"Dare." He answered proudly.

"I dare you to let Deca into your mind." Dustin said.

"No way, that's not fair." Lucas objected.

"Nowhere in the rules of truth or dare does it state a dare cannot include having your mind read." Dustin pointed out.

"I wonder why." Lucas glared with sarcasm.

"Fine, whatever." Lucas scooted into the middle of the circle. Deca took the hint and moved towards him. They sat across from each other, knees touching.

"Hand." She whispered to him. He nodded and pushed it towards her.

"Are you sure?" She asked him, looking into his eyes. He hesitantly nodded.

"Don't think too hard about one thing, or about not thinking of that thing. I'll go to that first." She warned him, he nodded nervously.

"Ready?" She asked, her hands hovering over his. He gave a quick nod.

She took his hand in her palms, she gripped tightly and let herself be pulled into his cognitive current.

She became surrounded by moments from his life. Sitting around the table with his parents, chasing Erica out of his room, spending hours on a campaign with the party in the Wheeler's basement, moments when they looked for Will, moments when they fought against the Demogorgon.

There was peace after that, a type of unsettling peace. Things didn't return to the way they were. Will was different, Mike was different, the party was different.

Then Max came. MadMax. She made him nervous, but he thought she was cool.

The feeling in his stomach was hard to bear when he told her about Will and El and the Upside Down. When she finally believed him, and she helped them with Dart and the Demodogs it was like she understood him and cared.

With Will and Mike there was something holding them back, and with Dustin it was like Max drove a wedge between them. Lucas hated how his friends didn't feel like his friends.

He thought about her all the time. The way she stood up to Billy was so cool, scary but cool. He admired her.

Deca recognized that feeling he got when he was around her. The fluttering in his belly, the constant urge to smile, the way words tend to get caught in his throat, the way his palms sweat when she's near him.

She liked this familiar feeling.

"Deca?" Lucas' voice pulled her from his mind.

She was suddenly sitting back on the green rug, her knees touching his. She looked at him, his face twisted in confusion.

"What's wrong?" He asked her.

"Nothing. Its nice." She gave a small smile.

She used her sleeve to wipe away the blood beginning to drip down her lip.

"Ok, Mike, your turn." Lucas pushed himself back into his place in the circle.

AN: Well, that's a short chapter but I wanted to right a nice little one shot with the kiddos. I hope you liked it. The next few chapters will be a little longer and a little more intense. Thanks for reading!

9. Chapter 9

Jim walked into the bar. A bar he'd been to more times than he cared to count. This time he felt strangely nervous. He knew what was going to happen. If Owens had an ounce of sense, he would follow through with their agreement. But he was going to have to let him know about Deca, he wondered if it would impact the outcome of this meeting.

Deca has been staying with him for barely two weeks. It hasn't been long at all, but he couldn't imagine not having her there. She was a good kid, and her and El were joined at the hip.

It was nice to know he wasn't leaving El all alone when he went to work, and the girls were doing really good. He wasn't crazy about those kids coming over all the time, but he knew how happy it made them both. He felt strange letting down his guard with them.

Owens was sitting in a booth, a cup of coffee sat between his hands.

"Chief," He greeted. Jim gave a nod and took the seat.

"Long time, no see." Sarcasm dripped from his tone. The last time they saw each other, Jim was fashioning his belt into a tourniquet around Owens' mauled leg. He was also greeted by Eleven, a true ghost of Hawkins' Lab's past.

"How ya doin'?" Jim asked. He wasn't excited to be making small talk but he knew how these things go.

"I'm alright, had to hang up the tap shoes." They both shared a small chuckle.

"Listen, I know what this is about. I'm working on it. It's gonna take some time." Owens' voice was low, but he kept that friendly, cool tone.

"Well, I'm about to add to the workload. There's another." Jim spoke low, he pulled the pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. He pulled one out and stuck it between his teeth.

"Another what?" Owens asked. Jim lit it up and inhaled deeply, desperately needing some nicotine.

"Another kid. She got out that night, wandered the woods a couple days, now she's staying with me." He exhaled smoke.

Owens smirk faded. Not an ounce of amusement could be found on his aged mouth.

"Ten." He sighed, Jim gave a nod of confirmation.

"You're gonna help them out. Help them live a normal life, right?" Jim asked, he sat forward.

"I'll see what I can do. One is doable, but two? You're asking for trouble." He spoke nervously.

"If I were you, I'd do the right thing. You should be more afraid of them than you are of me. Or whatever the hell took over that lab. She stopped 'em, and she can do a hell of a lot more." Jim growled. He backed off, knowing Owens was thoroughly intimidated.

"I'll see you soon, Doc. Rest that leg." Jim patted the table and got up to leave. He walked out with his head high.

...

That morning it was just the two of them, Deca and El. Sitting

El was laying on the sofa reading Black Beauty, a small notebook with a pencil held in the spiral spine was on her chest. Any time she came across a word she didn't know and couldn't sound out, she'd copy it down for when Hopper came home.

Deca was sitting in cross-legged on the overstuffed chair. She was reading too, she had sped through the golden spine books over the past few days.

She was getting better at sounding out words, and her writing was getting good too.

The girls would sit silently for most the day, after Deca finished a

book she would reward herself with listening to a song. Dustin had gifted her his Walkman. He gave her an in-depth lesson on it. He showed her how to change the batteries, how to flip the tape to listen to the other side, how to fast-forward or reverse when you want to listen to a certain song.

She loved the Walkman. She sometimes sat with El, each of them holding a side of the headphones to their ears. She liked this just as much, maybe more than listening to the song alone. To share the music with someone else made her heart flutter.

The sound of the radio interrupted them. Both girls raced to it.

".- -" Hopper was telling them something. El searched the chart pinned to the wall.

"W." She said the letter softly, pointing it out on the wall.

".."

".-.."

".-.."

"I. L. L. Will." She smiled, hoping she'd be able to see him. But soon her smile faded.

Please don't be gone. She thought to herself, she feared that this was a message he had passed. Jim told her he was ok.

"It's ok." Deca spoke softly. She reached out and rested her hand on El's back.

They sat together on the sofa. They disregarded their books. Each of them leaned against the other's shoulder pressing a headphone to their ear letting the Thriller album distract them from the bad news. This was Dustin's favorite album ever, he especially loved the title track. He showed her a few moves, but he had the entire dance committed to memory.

As the album was ending, their listening was interrupted by a knock at the door. Jim's special knock.

El focused her eyes and unlocked the door with a nod.

Jim walked through the door. He took off his hat and set it on the table. They looked at him with worry.

"What?" He asked unzipping his coat. El wasn't sure what to say, she looked at the floor.

"Go get some shoes on, we're going." He told them.

"Going?" El asked sitting up.

"Going to Will's." He clarified as he unbuttoned his work shirt.

"Will is ok?" She asked.

"Yeah, he's ready for visitors." He shrugged on a green flannel.

The girls raced to their room. El threw Deca a pair of loafers as she pulled on her sneakers.

They came out of the room ready to leave. For Deca, it was the first time stepping outside since she was brought there.

"Let's go." Jim said. They followed him out the door.

Deca forgot what it was like to be in the car. She liked it. The truck was big and bouncy and noisy. She liked the warm air that blew from the vents.

She felt very conflicted. Sitting between Jim and El was strange. On one side, he was nervous about having them out. Things still weren't totally safe; *not that they'll ever be totally safe*, he reminded himself. For El, there was just excitement and joy. She cared for Will. Even though they never spent time together or even officially met, he was her friend.

They got to the Byers residence. Deca followed them to the porch. Jim rose his hand to knock but the door opened. A woman stood in the doorway she looked at him with a wide, honest smile.

She waved them through. Smiling with a raise of her shoulders at El.

She looked a bit confused but smiled warmly at Deca.

"How is he?" El asked.

"He's good, sweetie. Go ahead, Mike's in there now." She told her. El started for his room, Deca followed.

"Who's this?" Joyce asked. Deca stopped, she focused on the walls. There

"Hey, Deca. Come introduce yourself." Jim nodded towards Joyce.

"I'm Deca. Thank you for inviting me, Joyce." She said softly, offering a small smile.

"Nice to meet you. Follow Eleven, he'll be happy to have the company." Joyce smiled at her then turned towards Jim. Deca quickly walked down the hall.

She had seen so much of the Byers' house through everyone else's memories, it was nice to see it for herself. Before she got to the end of the hall, she could hear Jim and Joyce talking.

"Who is she?" She asked in a whisper, though her thoughts didn't change in volume.

"She's like El." He said, not sure how much was too much.

"You keep surprising me, Hop." She said with a small chuckle.

Deca abandoned her eavesdropping and gently tapped on the door to Will's room. Mike opened it, he moved to the side to let her through.

Will, scrawny and pale sat cross legged on his bed.

"This is Deca. El's sister." Mike introduced her. He smiled and waved to her. She returned the greeting and stood behind Mike.

Will was a bit overwhelmed.

He was happy to have Mike there, more than happy. But meeting El was strange. He had heard so much about her but after seeing her she

didn't seem real.

This girl standing in front of him was supposed to be a genuine superhero. She became a legend of his friend group. Everyone had their Eleven story, even Mom. Eleven saved his life twice, now. She saved the world. She defeated monsters, of both the human and Upside Down variety. But she just looked like a girl.

She was short and thin and had a crooked smile and curly hair. She was quiet and seemed sweet and if she passed him in the hall he probably wouldn't look twice. He was perplexed by her.

He was even more perplexed by the way Mike saw her.

He had always known Mike cared a lot about Eleven. Some days Mike would go on for hours talking about her, but after a few months those talks stopped. He would flinch at the mention of her.

Will had a feeling Mike liked her, as more than a friend, though he'd never admit it. But seeing the way he greeted her at the door, the way his smile widened. Will could see it, he could practically hear Mike's heart running laps around his chest.

"How are you feeling?" El's voice pulled him back into reality. He looked at her, there was true concern on her face.

"I'm ok, I think. I don't remember most of it." He tried not to think about it but the flashes replayed again.

He turned to see Deca, a girl he hadn't heard of before. She looked startled, almost disturbed. Like she'd seen a ghost. He shrugged it off.

"H-how are you feeling?" He asked her.

"Better. I was tired, but better now."

Will wasn't sure what to say. He didn't know why it felt so awkward, but it was.

"You draw." Deca's soft voice broke through the silence. Will looked over at her, she stared intently at the wall.

"I draw sometimes. But those weren't me." He replied.

"Not those, that one." She said stepping forward, pointing at the drawing tacked over his bed. Part of it was covered by a snake of tunnel drawings. It was an old drawing for d&d. He drew the whole party, his wizard, Will the Wise, was shooting fireballs. His mom called them cabbages.

"Yeah that was our old party. We play as new characters now." He told her.

A small, rhythmic knock interrupted the awkwardness.

"Hey," Joyce whispered as she walked in.

"Dustin and Lucas will be over soon. Lucas said on the phone that Max will be here too. Some of Johnathan's friends too." She smirked.

"Johnathan has friends?" Will asked lightly. Joyce rolled her eyes, suppressing a chuckle.

"Why are you doing all this?" He asked, a more serious tone to his soft voice.

"You're been through a lot. A party will do us all some good." She tried to maintain her smile. The truth was, she wanted the distraction. She wanted to feel ok, but at the moment she was far from it. Joyce knew her boy felt the same.

Will agreed to the party. Not only to please his mom but because he hoped she was right. He hoped that game night with friends would make him feel better. He hoped an evening of laughs and popcorn fights and teasing each other like they used to would stop this feeling. A feeling of disconnect, not being totally present. Since the gate closed, he's felt foggy; it was like part of him was damaged or destroyed after the mind flayer left him.

The party started smoothly. Lucas came first, with Max. Dustin came next.

The house was full. Everyone was talking, laughing.

The feeling of joy was overwhelming for Deca. She was swaddled in it.

Deca sat next to El on the floor while the boys set up the game board. They had all agreed on Monopoly.

Mike explained the rules, but promised it would be easier to understand once they started playing.

They each chose their token. Lucas yelled claim over the battleship, Dustin took the dog, Max grabbed the race car, Mike shrugged and settled on the wheelbarrow, Will took the top hat.

"What is this?" El asked holding up a piece.

"An iron. You use it to get the wrinkles out of your clothes." Mike told her. She scrunched her nose up and put it down.

"This?" She asked picking up another.

"A thimble. It protects your finger while you sew." He explained. She shrugged her shoulders and set it down on the table in front of her.

"Deca?" Mike asked.

"Boot." She answered softly as she reached for it.

They all rolled the die. With a six, Max went first.

The game was slow. Deca didn't really like it, but she liked that everyone was together.

"Can we have a snack break?" Will asked, interrupting Dustin and Lucas' squabbling over the proper way to be the banker.

Everyone agreed.

All the hungry children circled around the kitchen table where Joyce had put out a few bags of chips, a bowl of assorted Halloween candy that was on sale at Melvald's, and a two liter bottle of cola.

Deca asked for the bathroom, she was walking towards the door

when she heard the muffled sound of music. She followed it to a close door. She pressed her ear to it, it was music she had never heard before. She wanted to hear more of it.

She pushed open the door. Without the barrier, the sound hit against her at full force. She smiled at it, the feeling it shook her ears with.

She could feel the beat in the soles of her feet. Hearing the music without headphones was so different. Here, she was swimming in the sound. The soft vocals wrapped around her like a blanket and the instruments worked together to rock her into this feeling of wonder.

She turned to see Johnathan staring at her from the foot of his bed.

"Hi?" He said, he was unsure whether he was greeting or questioning her. She understood his confusion, from his view she looked like a mouth breather, just standing there in the doorway grinning.

"The music." She nodded towards the turntable.

Johnathan understood. He still wondered who she was, but shrugged his shoulders and listened along.

The song drummed to an end and she turned back to Johnathan.

"Deca," She offered her name to him.

"Johnathan." He replied.

"I know." She smiled. He furrowed his brow but didn't ask.

"Who does this music?" She asked.

"The Talking Heads. Its a mix from different albums." He stood up and took the tape out.

"Talking Heads." She repeated. He nodded and smiled with the side of his mouth.

"Do you have more?" She asked stepping towards him.

"More of The Talking Heads?" He asked. Deca shook her head.

"More music." She clarified.

"Yeah, I listen to a lot." He said, searching through his records. He needed to listen to vinyl, he was tired of mix tapes.

"Music is my second favorite thing in the whole world." She told him as he held up a record.

He carefully slid the vinyl from its jacket and placed it on the turn table.

"This is The Velvet Underground. They're really good." He said as he moved the arm to a specific track. It was his favorite of their songs.

She sat down on the foot of the bed, her back to Johnathan as the music began filling the room. She couldn't help the smile growing on her face.

She sat in Johnathan's room while it played. She understood why it was his favorite of that band, it was beautiful.

Hearing the music through the air wasn't like it is through headphones. It didn't block out thoughts as well like this. She tried to focus on the smooth voice, not on the flashing images coming from Johnathan's head. A pretty girl was the focus of all of them, a girl Deca had seen so much of in everyone's memories. Nancy.

When he used to listen to this song it used to comfort his pain. The pain of watching her with Steve, the pain of pretending like he didn't love her. Now, he isn't so sad when he hears this song. Now, he doesn't have to steal glances into her pale blue eyes.

The song faded to an end. Deca turned to Johnathan.

"Thank you for sharing that with me." She spoke sincerely. He smiled.

He wasn't sure how to reply, but before he could he looked up to see Dustin in the doorway.

"Hey, we're starting again." He told her, she nodded and got up.

"Thank you." She said softly as she walked towards Dustin.

"See you later, Deca." He told her as she walked into the hall with a smile.

They started playing. This time it moved faster. Deca was getting game advice from Dustin, he called Mike ruthless.

"I'm strategic." Mike defended himself.

They played for hours, the boys only occasionally bickered. Towards the end of the game El and Deca had learned all the rules. Deca was sad when she had to stay in jail for two turns. Luckily, she rolled doubles and got to leave.

The game ended at nearly 7 pm. Mike ended up owning half the board. He won with a maniacal laugh. His impression of a movie villain made everyone laugh, despite their anger at his victory.

By then Joyce was nearly done with dinner. Jim and her had spent most the time together in the kitchen. She was pleasantly surprised by his cooking skills. They teased each other.

"That's great!" She exclaimed after tasting the spaghetti sauce that her and Jim made.

"I told you, I've got skills." He said putting out his cigarette.

"I mean, for a bachelor, I'm pretty good." He chuckled.

"Bachelor? C'mon Hop, you're like a mother hen now." Joyce laughed as she pushed the wooden spoon into his mouth for him to taste. He was about to reply but she shoved the spoon into his mouth.

When dinner was ready everyone lined up in the kitchen with paper plates and plastic forks in hand. They served themselves then sat in the living room to eat together.

The kids sat on the floor. Jim and Joyce stayed at the kitchen table having a hushed conversation, Johnathan invited Nancy, who came during the middle of the game, to eat in his room.

"What was it called?" Deca asked Dustin while pointing to her plate with the fork.

"Spaghetti." He said it slowly.

"Spaghetti." She repeated.

Everyone ate happily but there was still tension between El and Max. El still held a grudge over what she saw in the gym.

"El, you were really good at Monopoly for it being your first time." Max tried once again to spark conversation with her.

"I know." El said softly, shoveling a bite into her mouth. Everyone now noticed the awkwardness. Max sank with defeat.

"Max, you skateboard. Is that fun?" Deca asked trying to ease the tension.

"Yeah, it is. I could show you sometime." Max smiled.

"Now?" Deca asked. The group chuckled.

"Its dark out, and its cold." She shook her head and chuckled.

"I have a coat, and there's a light outside. Can we please?" Deca pleaded.

"I don't know if-" Max began.

"Please. I want to be a zoomer." Deca said with a small wink.

"Screw it, let's see if you got what it takes." She smirked.

They all threw away their plates and put their jackets on to go outside. Joyce shouted a warning to be safe and not outside too long to Will. He agreed and they all stepped onto the porch and into the dead grass surrounding the driveway.

"The most important thing is your stance. You have to be comfortable on the board, balance is really important." Max lectured in front of the group.

Deca listened attentively. She stood between Dustin and Lucas, both curious about skating. Mike, Will, and El stood on the porch.

"So, come step on the board." Max waved her over. Deca stepped towards her and looked at the board, she wasn't so sure now.

"Its ok, I've got you." Max said softly and put her hands out. Deca looked down at her hands.

"How about here?" Deca asked as she rested her hands on Max's shoulders.

"That's perfect. Now, put your left foot towards the top of the board- your other left. Yeah, that's it. Now your right foot goes to the back, perfect." Max instructed as Deca held tightly to her shoulders. She felt unsteady but liked it, the thrill was exhilarating.

"Try shifting your weight between your feet. Learning towards one then the other." Max spoke, Deca did. She did it for a few minutes and started to feel comfortable.

"Can I zoom now?" She asked.

"My kind of girl." Max chuckled.

"The driveway is a little rough so it might be tricky but you'll get it." Max said, helping Deca off the board. She moved the board to the middle of the driveway, the smoothest part.

"You're gonna make the board go by pushing off. Just keep your weight on your left foot, the one at the top of the board." Max stood straight, offering her shoulders to Deca for help getting on the board.

"Now, take your right foot off the board." Deca did as told.

"Perfect, now bend your left knee. Remember to keep your weight on the left foot. Only use the right to push off." Max told her. Deca hesitated.

"Like your right foot is kicking away the ground to push you forward." She explained. Deca nodded and took a deep breath.

She bent her knee, made sure she was leaning on her left foot. She pushed off with her right and the board moved.

The movement was a little bumpy because of the driveway, and she was probably moving too slow, but it was working. She was skate boarding. She pushed again, this time faster.

She had pushed off only three times before she pushed a bit too hard and ended up losing her balance.

She fell forward, she wasn't sure what to do with herself. She brought her hands up to her face. Her knees and forearms took most of the blow. She rolled onto her back and sat up, she dusted her knees off. They burned, she suspected her navy blue sweats were hiding the scrapes.

She wasn't that far from them but all of them came running over. Dustin rushed to her side first.

"Are you ok?" He asked panicked, everyone looked at her with eyes wide with concern, but Max. Max looked at her like she was waiting on her to say something, Deca knew what she expected her to say.

"Again." Deca said plainly as she got back up and brought the board to the start of the driveway. Max figured she'd give up and go back inside, Max was glad she was wrong.

They watched her try to figure it out for a little while. Max yelled both critiques and encouragements. Once she got on the board to show her how to better transition from her her foot being vertical to horizontal on the board.

Lucas and Dustin both wanted to try next. Dustin was very clumsy, but he laughed the whole time.

Lucas tried very hard to be good, but his stance was wrong. Max laughed hysterically every time he stumbled off, she teased him but once he was done she offered a sincere "You weren't terrible." Lucas pretended to be offended but inside his heart did somersaults.

"El, do you want to try?" Max asked her, really hoping she wouldn't be hit by the cold shoulder again.

El hesitated, it looked like fun but she didn't trust Max. She didn't see her as a friend. She looked to Mike who just shrugged his shoulders.

She turned to Deca.

Deca gave a small nod and a wink from over her shoulder. El couldn't read her mind but she got the message, it would be ok.

El walked to Max slowly, Max held her hands out to help her on the board.

El stood across from her and stared down at her hands. She exhaled and took them, her palms were warm and a bit sweaty. As she stepped onto the board she squeezed her hands tighter. She practiced leaning on her front foot, then the back foot. She let out a small giggle, she felt silly standing like that.

She started standing with one foot on the board, she didn't like feeling unbalanced. Max didn't instruct her like the others, her tone was warmer and even softer.

"I think you're ready to push off, I'll be right next to you." Max assured her. El nodded but avoided eye contact. Max stepped back, El took a deep breath and got into her position. She pushed off the ground and started moving. It was slow and wobbly and she felt unsteady, but she started smiling.

She started kicking off more, getting pretty fast. Max yelled to slow down but El wasn't sure how. Suddenly, she came to a stop when a wheel hit a large piece of gravel.

Everything happened in slow motion, El knew she was going to hurt herself if she hit the ground. She put her hands out in front of her and just thought about not falling. It was like there was something invisible between her and the ground. She hovered over the gravel. Like repelling magnets, this kinetic force between her and the dirt pushed her back. She landed softly into a standing position and breathed relief.

She put her sleeve to her nostril and turned towards the group. They stood slack jawed. Will and Max were most shocked. They hadn't really seen El's powers for themselves. Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and Deca were still pretty surprised.

El can fly. Holy shit. Dustin thought to himself.

Mike rushed to her side, he saw how she recovered but still was worried that she hurt herself.

"El, are you hurt?" He asked her softly, moving close to her. She shook her head, she smiled at him but then looked to Max walking towards her.

"I'm so sorry, El. I should have taught you how to slow down. I should have showed you-" Max started correcting her mistakes.

"Are you ok?" She asked sincerely. El nodded and went to grab the board.

"Not a zoomer." El said handing her skateboard back. She gave a small but sincere smile. It was a peace treaty, she knew she had no reason to not like Max. Max was a friend.

"Not a zoomer, a mage." Max smiled back.

AN: That was a long one, but I figured I'd make up for my hiatus. Hope you liked it. I'm easing into El and Will's friendship but I really wanted to reconcile El and Max since they are two awesome girls and shouldn't have this tension between them. Also, the 80s is an era of some of the greatest music and Johnathan has taste that's a little 80s but also some other stuff mixed in. I thought Pale Blue Eyes by The Velvet Underground would be a really fitting song for Nancy and Johnathan, you should give it a listen. Well, I suppose that's it for now. The next chapter will be a good one, I promise.